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THE KING'S CLASSICS UNDER
THE GENERAL EDITORSHIP OF
PROFESSOR GOLLANCZ



THE PRIORESS'S AND FOUR OTHER TALES



Griselda
from the XV cent. picture of the Umbrian school in the National Gallery

THE PRIORESS'S TALE
AND OTHER TALES BY
GEOFFREY CHAUCER
DONE INTO MODERN
ENGLISH BY PROF. SKEAT

ALEXANDER MORING LTD. THE DE
LA MORE PRESS 32 GEORGE STREET
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"THE CANTERBURY TALES . . . WHERE HE SHEWETH MORE
THE NATURALL OF HIS PLEASANT WIT THEN IN ANY OTHER OF
HIS WORKES; HIS SIMILITUDES, COMPARISONS, AND ALL OTHER
DESCRIPTIONS ARE SUCH AS CAN NOT BE AMENDED."

Puttenham.

"AS HE IS THE FATHER OF ENGLISH POETRY, SO I HOLD HIM
IN THE SAME DEGREE OF VENERATION AS THE GRECIANS HELD
HOMER, OR THE ROMANS VIRGIL; HE IS A PERPETUAL FOUNTAIN
OF GOOD SENSE."

Dryden.

"THE CHRONICLES OF LASTING FAME
SHALL EVERMORE EXTOLL THE NAME
OF PATTYENT GRISSELL, MY MOST PATTYENT WIFFE,"

Patient Grissell.

PREFACE

MODERNISED versions of four of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, by the present writer, have already appeared. These four are *The Knight's Tale*, *The Man of Law's Tale*, *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, and *The Squire's Tale*. The present collection contains the five best that remain, excluding such as are of insufficient interest, or otherwise unsuitable.

The Prioress's Tale.—*The Prioress's Tale* is preceded by that of *The Shipman*,¹ of which the Host (who accompanies the pilgrims as their guide and conductor) is pleased to approve. He then turns to the Prioress (at l. 1635 of the second Group of Tales):—

¹ Group B, in the Six-text edition, begins with *The Tale of the Man of Law* (with introductory matter), ll. 1-1162; *The Shipman's Prologue and Tale*, ll. 1163-1624; and *The Prioress's Prologue*, ll. 1625-1642.

pray to the Virgin; and consequently, when he had been murdered by enemies, and buried, for his sins, in unconsecrated ground, the Virgin appeared to a holy clerk, commanding that the corpse should be taken up and re-buried with honour. When this was done, a fresh and fragrant rose was found in its mouth, and the tongue was uncorrupted. In *The Academy* for Sept. 15, 1894, I gave a verse translation of this poem, from which I excerpt the following extracts:—

“The spice of good that lingered last
Was this: on no account he passed—
However on intrigue intent,
However much on pleasure bent—
Before the Virgin's image dear,
But down he knelt and dropped a tear.
Then on his knees, with rueful face,
He evermore implored her grace,
And piously would smite his breast.

* * * * *

Lo! in the sinner's mouth they found
A flower, as fragrant and as fair
As it had newly blossomed there;
And all beheld, with wondering dread,
The sinner's tongue as fresh and red
As is the new-blown rose in May.
As whole and uncorrupt it lay
As if its owner were alive.
Each gazer seems to see it strive
To move, as though it fain would pray,
And still some words of praise would say
To Christ and to His Mother dear.”

The French version of this poem is printed in *La Langue et la Littérature Françaises, Textes et Glossaire*; by K. Bartsch and A. Horning, Paris, 1887.

With Chaucer, the above flower became a grain, which may easily have been suggested by the old story of the three grains that were placed by Seth under Adam's tongue; see the *Cursor Mundi*, p. 87. And just as one of Coincy's tales enabled Chaucer to begin his tale, so another of them helped him to end it.

A similar story is that of The Paris Beggar-boy, murdered by a Jew, which exists (in English) in the Vernon MS. at Oxford. This was likewise printed by the Chaucer Society in 1876. In this version the anthem sung by the child is more fully indicated, and is clearly identified with that mentioned in the Note to l. 1708. Moreover, it is here a lily that is found in the child's mouth, and his song ceases when it is taken away.

Lydgate, in his *Legend of Dan Joos* (see *Minor Poems*, ed. Halliwell, p. 62), has a somewhat similar story of a monk who was continually singing five psalms in honour of the Virgin; and after his death, not only was a fresh rose found in his mouth, but

there were four more such roses, two springing from his eyes, and two from his ears! So that Coincy's miracle is here multiplied by five.

There is a Ballad in Percy's *Reliques of Ancient Poetry* (i. 32) entitled "The Jew's Daughter"; to the effect that a boy named Hugh was enticed to play and then stabbed by a Jew's daughter, who threw him into a draw-well. His mother, Lady Helen, finds him by hearing his voice.

The story of Hugh of Lincoln (see Note to l. 1874) is given by Matthew of Paris; and may also be found in the English version of *Manners, Customs, and Dress, during the Middle Ages*, originally written in French by Paul Lacroix; pp. 434-455.

A similar story, of William of Norwich, is referred to in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, under the date 1137. See the Note in the edition by Earle and Plummer. As to the cruel treatment of the Jews in England, see the Note on The Jews in England in *Annals of England*, p. 162.

A modernised edition of this Tale will be found among Wordsworth's Poems; but my own version was made independently of this. In a subsequent comparison of the two, I was somewhat surprised to find that the poet has deviated from Chaucer's system

of arranging the rhymes, in four instances. Chaucer's stanza has the rhymes arranged in the order *ababbcc*; by which is meant that the first line rhymes with the third, the second with the fourth and fifth, and the last two together. Wordsworth's deviations are all different. In his ninth stanza he has *ababcddc* (*i. e.* eight lines instead of seven); in his fourteenth, *abbaacc*; in his nineteenth, *ababcac*; and in the last, *abacddc*.

The Pardoner's Tale.—This Tale occurs in Group C of the Six-text edition, which contains (1) *The Physician's Tale, or the Story of Virginia*, ll. 1–286; (2) *The Words of the Host to the Physician and Pardoner*, ll. 287–328; (3) *The Pardoner's Prologue*, ll. 329–462; (4) *The Pardoner's Tale*, ll. 463–968. But as *The Pardoner's Tale* contains matter which, however interesting in itself, is altogether irrelevant to the story, I have retained the story only, which really occupies only ll. 463–484 and 661–894. I have, however, included ll. 488–504 to save some abruptness of transition. Even so, it is impossible to preserve a clear connexion; for it is the fact that Chaucer abruptly begins l. 661 with a reference to “These three rioters,” whereas he had not previously mentioned them, but had merely made the general

statement that there was a company of riotous people in Flanders.

The story is really of extreme antiquity, and originally of Eastern origin. Numerous analogous stories have been collected and printed for the Chaucer Society by Mr. W. A. Clouston. At pp. 417-436 of these *Originals and Analogues* is printed a Buddhist original, together with varying versions in several languages, viz. Persian, Arabic, Kashmiri, and Tibetan. Versions also occur in French, Italian, German, and Portuguese.

The Buddhist story is entitled "Vedabbha Jātaka," being the 48th story in Fausböll's edition of the Pāli text of the Jātaka-book. Two different forms of the Italian version, as appearing in different editions of the *Cento Novelle Antiche*, have been printed by Dr. Furnivall, in his *Originals and Analogues* (Chaucer Soc.), Pt. ii. pp. 131-133. Of these, the former is from the edition of 1525, where it appears as Novella 83; the other is from the edition of 1572, where it is Novella 82. The latter is much more like Chaucer's story than the former, and may have been his authority. Or he may have met with it in an old French Fabliau.

The Clerk's Tale.—This is the first Tale of Group E in the Six-text edition, ll. 1-1212; the only other Tale in this Group being *The Merchant's Tale*, with a Prologue and Epilogue, ll. 1213-2440. There is nothing to link this Group with anything that precedes it in the MSS.

The Prologue (ll. 1-56), in the usual rhyming couplets, is evidently of later date than the Tale, and was supplied at the time of revision. It refers not only to the death of Petrarch in July 1374, but to that of Linian, *i. e.* Giovanni di Lignano, who died in 1383; so that it could not have been written till after the latter date.

The Tale itself (ll. 57-1162) is a rather close translation from Petrarch's Latin version of a tale originally written in Italian by Boccaccio. It is the last tale in Boccaccio's *Decamerone*, written shortly after 1348. From what source Boccaccio derived it is unknown.

It is quite certain that Chaucer did not follow Boccaccio's version, which he probably never saw, but had before him Petrarch's Latin version, entitled *De obedientia et fide uxoria Mythologia*, of which he must have obtained a copy. There is no reason to doubt Chaucer's own distinct statement (in l. 27)

that he¹ first heard the tale from Petrarch himself at Padua; probably in 1373. And that Chaucer had a copy before him to translate from is obvious throughout; thus in l. 1147 he says that "Petrarch *writeth* This story, which with high style he enditeth." We may fairly conclude that Chaucer and Petrarch met at Padua early in 1373, when the latter told Chaucer the story by word of mouth (l. 40); and that Chaucer shortly after obtained a copy of Petrarch's translation, which he kept constantly before him whilst making his own version. It is probable that *The Clerk's Tale* was first written in 1373 or 1374; and it required but little revision to make it suitable for a Canterbury Tale. He accordingly prefixed the Prologue (ll. 1-56), and added, in the liveliest manner of his latest style, lines 1163-1212; referring to the pilgrims in general in l. 1163, and to the Wife of Bath in particular in l. 1170. He also supplied, at the same time, ll. 995-1008.

The story of Griselda, as told by Boccaccio in the *Decamerone*, together with Petrarch's Latin version of it, and the letter of Petrarch to Boccaccio concern-

¹ The objection that it was the *Clerk*, not Chaucer, who met Petrarch, is a mere quibble. The poor Clerk had no money to pay for so long a journey; it was Chaucer himself who was sent to Italy on business.

ing it, are all reprinted in the *Originals and Analogues of some of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales*, Part ii. (Chaucer Soc.), 1875. Were any additional proof needed that Chaucer had the Latin version before him, it is supplied by the fact that numerous quotations from that version are actually written in the margins of the Ellesmere and Hengwrt MSS. of the Tales, each in its proper place.

The story of Griselda was well known and very popular in later times; and there are several known ballads concerning "Patient Grissell."

The Second Nun's Tale.—This is the first Tale in Group G of the Six-text edition of the Tales. There is nothing to link it on to anything that precedes. There is not even any statement to show who the Second Nun was; but as, in the general Prologue, there is a description of the Prioress, followed by a mention of "another Nun," we must conclude that this is the personage intended.

The Tale is one which Chaucer had already composed in earlier days, as he himself tells us; for he alludes to it, by the title of *The Life of Saint Cecyle*, in his Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*. It was originally intended as a Legend to be read, not a story to be recited; since he uses the expression—

"Yet pray I you that read-en what I write" (l. 78). In l. 62 he had described himself as an "unworthy son of Eve," and had the misfortune to leave this expression uncorrected in his revision; for "son" is an inappropriate epithet for the "Second Nun." If anything was done to it at the time of revision, it was the insertion (mainly from Dante) of the three stanzas in ll. 36-56.

It is certain that this *Life of St. Cecilia*, as its author once called it, is little more than a translation from two Latin sources. The former is the *Life of St. Cecilia* as given in the *Legenda Aurea* (or Golden Legend) of Jacobus Januensis, or Jacobus a Voragine, who was Archbishop of Genoa at the close of the thirteenth century. Chaucer follows this version closely, from l. 85 down to l. 348 or thereabouts. In the latter part of the legend, his translation agrees rather with another Latin life of the saint, as given in a work entitled *De Vitis Sanctorum*, ab Aloysio Lipomano, episcopo Veronae, a F. L. Surio emendatis et auctis, Venetiis, 1581; p. 161.

Chaucer also took a few particulars from the *Lives of Valerian and Tiburtius*, as given in the *Acta Sanctorum* (April 14).

The first four stanzas (ll. 1-28) are partly imitated

from a French version of *The Golden Legend* by Jehan de Vignay, printed at Paris in 1513; and reprinted in the *Originals and Analogues*, published by the Chaucer Society, Pt. ii, p. 190. In the Legend itself, Chaucer does not follow this French version, but only the Latin legends above mentioned.

Saint Cecilia.—There are lives of St. Cecilia in English much older than Chaucer's. The earliest of these is in Anglo-Saxon, and is printed at p. 149 of *The Shrine*, a publication by the Rev. T. O. Cockayne. There is another Anglo-Saxon version in *Ælfric's Lives of the Saints*, ed. Skeat, ii. 356. Both of these are given under the date Nov. 22, which is Saint Cecilia's day. I subjoin a modern English rendering of the last eighteen lines of the latter A.S. version, for comparison with the last five stanzas (ll. 519-553).

“ She lay in the bath over a burning fire
the whole day and night with uninjured body
as if in cold water, and she did not even sweat.
Then they told Almachius how the maiden continued
in the hot bath, with sound body,
and even without sweat. Then sent he an executioner
to her,
and commanded him to behead her in the hot water.
So the executioner struck her with his sword

once and again and a third time, but her neck was
not cut through;
and anon he left her lying half alive,
because the senate had decreed that no executioner
should
strike four times, when he slew a criminal.
Then she lived three days, and instructed the faithful,
and committed her hand-maidens to the illustrious
pope,
and her house was consecrated as a holy church,
where, by God's help, miracles were often wrought.
And Urban the pope buried her honourably,
to the glory of the Almighty who reigns in eternity.

The story duly appears in Caxton's English version of *The Golden Legend*.

An interesting account of the statue and church of St. Cecilia will be found in Mrs. Jameson's well-known work on *Sacred and Legendary Art*.

The connexion of St. Cecilia with the art of music is of comparatively late date; she is never accompanied by musical attributes in any early representation.

The Canon's Yeoman.—No such personage is noticed in the general Prologue to the Tales. But Chaucer seized upon the idea, whilst writing his Tales, of saying something by way of exposing the practice of alchemy by cheating adepts, who preyed upon such as became their dupes. The way in which

he introduces this character is very ingenious. He says that, just as the Second Nun had completed the tale of St. Cecilia, the pilgrims to Canterbury were overtaken by two men who had ridden hard in order to catch them up. Of the two new-comers the former was a Canon, who had lately been wholly engaged in practising alchemy, and had found many dupes ready to supply him with money for the purpose; his companion being his Yeoman, or servant, who prepared his fires and did all the dirty work for him. The Yeoman, who was getting tired of such service, volunteered to state some truths about his master, which the Canon so much resented that he tried to stop his mouth; but when this attempt failed, the master thought it better to depart, and "fled away for very sorrow and shame." When he is fairly gone, the Yeoman first of all explains, in unsparing fashion, some of the unsuccessful experiments in alchemy in which he had taken a part, and afterwards tells a Tale to illustrate the cheating tricks employed by some of the adepts.

The Canon's Yeoman's Tale.—This is one of Chaucer's later Tales, composed at the time when he was revising the series. It was, practically, an afterthought, and was added to the set by the con-

trivance described just above. No original authority for it is known; and we gather that Chaucer is unsparingly revealing some tricks that had been but recently practised in London, in which he expressly lays the scene. It is clear that the poet had done his best to learn some of the secrets of the art, as he displays great familiarity with the names of the substances and processes employed. Ll. 720-971 of Group G (not here reproduced) are fully occupied with these; after which follows the Tale itself (ll. 971-1387), concluded by advice to his hearers to let "the philosopher's stone" alone.

The Tale relates how a certain Canon (not the Yeoman's master, but a still greater adept) beguiled a priest into paying him a large sum for a valueless receipt. This he did by exhibiting three tricks of mere sleight of hand, which are carefully described. No further explanation is needed.

The Five Tales.—The five Tales in this volume are taken, as explained above, from various Groups of the Tales, as they are arranged in the Six-text edition. Thus the *Prioress's Tale* is from Group B; the *Pardoner's*, from Group C; the *Clerk's*, from Group E; and the *Second Nun's* and *Canon's Yeoman's*, from Group G. In each case, the lines are num-

bered as in the Six-text edition, *The Student's* (or Oxford) *Chaucer*, and the Globe edition; so that the corresponding line of the original can always easily be found.

The present version.—As before, I have carefully endeavoured to preserve the text of the original where such a proceeding is practicable. On the other hand, I have avoided the use of obsolete words and archaic forms, and confine myself almost wholly to modern English words and idioms. The retention of old words and forms only produces a form of “English” that never at any time existed; and is, practically, misleading. The present version, in a word, is meant for the reader who is only acquainted with modern English, and should be judged of accordingly. If any such reader can be induced to study the original, so much the better. He will then understand that the charm and melody of the original language, when rightly understood and pronounced, are quite inimitable, and are worth all the honest labour that may have been expended in acquiring a sound knowledge of the peculiarities of Chaucer’s speech.

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THE PRIORESS'S TALE

5

THE PROLOGUE OF THE PRIORESS'S TALE

Domine, dominus noster.

OLORD our God, how wondrously Thy Name
Throughout the spacious world is spread!—quoth she;
For not alone dost Thou Thy praise proclaim 1645
By worthy laud of men of dignity,
But e'en by children's mouths Thy bounty free
Is perfected; for at the mother's breast
They make at times Thy glory manifest.

Wherefore in praise, as best I can or may,
Of Thee, O Christ, and of the Lily-flower
That bare Thee, yet remains a Maid alway,
I tell my tale, as lies within my power;
Not that I can increase Her glory's dower;
For She Herself is glory, and fountain chief 1655
Of bounty; next Her Son, our souls' relief!

O Mother Maid ! O maiden Mother free !
 O bush unburnt, burning in Moses' sight ;
 That didst draw downward from the Deity,
 By humbleness, the Spirit that did light 1660
 Within Thy heart, by Whose effulgence bright
 Conceivèd was the Father's Sapience—
 Help me to tell it in Thy reverence !

Lady ! Thy goodness, Thy magnificence,
 Thy Virtue and Thy great humility, 1665
 Can no man's tongue express in fitting sense ;
 For sometimes, Lady ! ere men pray to Thee,
 Thou go'st before in Thy benignity,
 And by Thy prayer procurest us the light
 To guide us upward to Thy Son aright ! 1670

My cunning is so weak, O blissful Queen !
 To utter all Thy mighty worthiness,
 I scarcely can sustain the weight, I ween ;
 But as a child a twelvemonth old, or less,
 That scarcely can a childish word express, 1675
 Right so fare I ; and therefore I Thee pray,
 Now guide me in the song I have to say.

HERE BEGINNETH THE PRIORESS'S
TALE

THERE was in Asia, in a city great,
'Mong Christian folk, a Jewish colony,
Maintained by one, a lord of high estate, 1680
For lucre's sake and sordid usury
Hateful to Christ and all His company ;
And through the street might all men ride or wend,
For it was free, and open at either end.

A little school of Christian folk there stood 1685
Down at the further end, in which there were
A crowd of children, come of Christian blood,
Who in that school were taught, from year to year,
Such sort of learning as in use was there ;
That is to say, to read, and sing thereto, 1690
As little children in their childhood do.

Among these children was a widow's son,
A little chorister, some seven years old,
Who day by day to school would blithely run,
And eke, when he the image did behold
Of Christ's dear Mother, as he had been told,
His custom was to kneel adown and say
His Ave-Mary, ere he went his way.

art has
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1695
cannot
p. 10

4 This widow thus her little son hath taught
Our blissful Lady, Christ's own Mother sweet 1700
To worship aye, and he forgat it not ;
For forward child will soon his task repeat.
But aye, when with such circumstance I meet,
Saint Nicholas in my presence standeth near,
Who at so young an age did Christ revere. 1705

5 This little child, his lesson studying,
As in the school his primer he did con,
He *Alma Redemptoris* heard them sing,
As children learnt their anthems one by one ;
And, as he durst, he near and nearer won, 1710
And hearkened to the words and to the note
Until he knew the first verse all by rote.

He knew not what the Latin meant to say,
For he of age so tender was and young ;

Wales
about 1695
writing
you up
now
want

But on a time did he a comrade pray 1715
The song to construe in his native tongue,
Or tell him why this anthem thus was sung ;
This would he pray him construe and declare
Full oftentimes on bended knees and bare.

7 His comrade, which that elder was than he, 1720
Thus answered him : " This song, have I heard say,
Was written of our blissful Lady free,
To bid Her hail ; and further, Her to pray
To be our succour in our dying day ;
I cannot of this matter more explain, 1725
Small grammar know I, but to sing am fain."

" And is this song composed in reverence
Of Christ's dear Mother ? "—said this innocent ;
" Now, truly, will I do my diligence
To con it all ere Christmas-tide be spent. 1730
Though for my primer I have punishment,
And shall be beaten thrice within the hour,
I'll con it all, to praise Her to my power."

His comrade, going homeward, secretly
Him taught it day by day, and all by rote ; 1735
And soon he sang it, well and lustily,

From word to word, each answering to the note ;
Twice in the day it issued from his throat,
Towards the school and homeward as he went ;
On Christ's dear Mother set was his intent. 1740

And thus throughout the Jewish quarter he,
This little child, while passing to and fro,
Would daily sing, and cry full merrily
O Alma Redemptoris, balm of woe !
The sweetness hath his spirit piercèd so 1745
Of Christ's dear Mother, that, to Her to pray,
He cannot cease from singing by the way.

11
Our ancient foe, the serpent Satanas,
That hath in Jewish heart his wasp-like nest,
Upswelled, and said, "O Hebrew folk ! alas ! 1750
Can this be suffered by each Jewish breast,
That such a boy shall walk where seems him best
In your despite, still singing such a song
That to your reverence of the Law doth wrong ?"

Thenceforward have the Jewish folk conspired 1755
This innocent from out the world to chase ;
And thereto soon a homicide have hired
That in an alley had a privy place ;

And as the child towards him bent his pace,
This cursèd Jew him caught, and held him fast, 1760
And cut his throat, and in a pit him cast.

I say, they in a loathsome pit him threw 13
Where ordure vile did evil scents exhale ;
O cursèd band of cruel Herods new,
What can your ill intention you avail ? 1765
Murder will out, in sooth it will not fail,
And chiefly where God wills to spread His name ;
His blood out-crieth on your deed of shame.

Martyr devoted to virginity,
Now mayst thou sing amid the saints anon 1770
Before the white celestial Lamb !—quoth she ;
Of whom the great evangelist St. John
In Patmos wrote, who saith that such pass on
Before the Lamb, and sing a song all new,
Who ne'er of womankind th' embraces knew. 1775

Now waiteth this poor widow all the night
To see her little child ; yet came he not ;
And therefore, when appeared the morning light,
With face all pale with dread and busy thought,
She first at school, and elsewhere him hath sought, 1780

Till finally did she the tidings glean,
He near the Jewish quarter last was seen.

16 With mother's pity in her breast enclosed
She goes, as she were half distraught in mind,
To every place wherein she hath supposed 1785
By likelihood her little child to find ;
And ever on Christ's dear mother meek and kind
She cried, till at the last so far she wrought
That she among the cursèd Jews him sought.

She prayeth and beseecheth piteously 1790
Of every Jew that dwelt within that place
To tell her if they saw her child pass by ;
They answered " Nay ! " But Jesu, of His grace,
Put in her mind, within a little space,
That for her son in that same place she cried 1795
Where he was cast within the pit beside.

O God of heaven ! that dost Thy praise declare
By mouth of innocents, lo ! here Thy might !
This gem of chastity, this emerald rare,
And eke of martyrdom this ruby bright, 1800
Where he with severed throat thus lay upright,
He *Alma Redemptoris* gan to sing
So loud, that all the place began to ring.

The Christian folk that through that quarter went,
Ran thither, for to wonder at this thing ; 1805
And hastily they for the provost sent,
Who came anon, nor thought of tarrying,
And praiseth Christ, that is of Heaven the King,
And eke His Mother, glory of mankind ;
And after that, the Jews he bade them bind. 1810

This child with piteous lamentation
Was taken up, yet sang his song alway ;
And with great honour, in procession,
Him to the nearest abbey they convey.
Beside the bier his mother swooning lay. 1815
And scarcely could the people that were near
Remove this second Rachel from the bier.

With torture and with shameful death each one
The provost did the Jews of life bereave
That of this murder knew, and that anon ; 1820
He would not such a wickedness forgive.
He that deserveth ill shall ill receive.
Them therefore with wild horses did he draw, — 1825
And after that he hanged them by the law.

Upon his bier still lies this innocent 1825
Before the altar, while the mass doth last ;

The abbot with his monks thereafter went,
And hastened them to bury him full fast ;
And, when they holy water on him cast,
Yet spake the child, when touched with holy water, 1830
And sang :—*O Alma Redemptoris Mater !*

The abbot, one that was a holy man,
As monks are all, or always ought to be,
This tender martyr to conjure began,
And said :—“ O child so dear ! I crave of thee, 1835
In virtue of the holy Trinity,
Tell me, to sing thy song whence comes thy might,
Since severed is thy throat, as seems to sight ? ”

“ My throat is cut right to the very bone,”
He said, “ and as by way of human kind 1840
I should have died, yea, many an hour ago ;
But Jesus Christ, as in your books ye find,
Wills that His glory last, and be in mind ;
And, for the honour of His Mother dear,
I still may sing *O Alma !* loud and clear. 1845

This well of mercy, Christ’s own Mother dear,
To love, as best I could, I still was fain ;
And when the moment of my death drew near,

To me she came, and bade me sing again
This holy anthem in my dying pain, 1850
As ye have heard ; and, when that I had sung,
Methought she laid a grain upon my tongue.

Wherefore I sing, and still shall sing again
In honour of that blissful Maiden free,
Till from my tongue off-taken is the grain ; 1855
And afterward thus said she unto me,
' My little child, then will I come for thee
When from thy tongue the grain away they take ;
Be not aghast ; I will thee not forsake.' "

This holy man, this abbot—him mean I— 1860
His tongue hath caught, and took away the grain ;
And he gave up the ghost all peacefully.
And when this abbot saw this wonder plain,
His briny tears ran trickling down like rain ;
And prone he fell all flat upon the ground, 1865
And still he lay, as if he had been bound.

The monks lay likewise on the pavement-stone,
Weeping, and praising oft Christ's Mother dear ;
And after that they rose, and forth are gone,
And bore away this martyr from the bier ; 1870

And in a tomb of marble white and clear
They straight enclose his little body sweet.
Where he is now, God grant us all to meet !

And oh ! young Hugh of Lincoln ! slain e'en so
By Jews, as well is known in every place— 1875
For it was but a little while ago—
Pray eke for us, poor sinners weak and base,
That, in His mercy, God so full of grace
May multiply on us His mercy here,
In honour of His Mother, Mary dear !—Amen. 1880

Here is ended the Prioress's Tale.

THE PARDONER'S TALE

IN Flanders was there once a company
Of youthful folk, disposed to revelry,
Engrossed with riot, gaming, hostelries, 465
Wherein with harps and lutes and minstrelsies
They danced and played at dice both day and night.
They feasted and they drank beyond their might,
And to the devil thus did sacrifice
Within the devil's temples, haunts of vice, 470
With gross indulgence, such as men should hate ;
Their oaths were all so blasphemous and great
That it was horrible to hear them swear ;
Our blessed Saviour's body would they tear,
As though Jews rent Him insufficiently ; 475
And laughed at one another's blasphemy.
And tumbling-girls, well-made and young to boot,
Would come and dance, and girls that sold them fruit,

Singers with harps, and sellers eke of cates,
 That are the devil's servants and his baits 480
 To kindle and blow the fire of luxury
 That is annexèd unto gluttony ;
 The holy scripture I to witness take,
 That wine and drunkenness offenders make. 484

King Herod at his feast, with wine oppressed,
 E'en at his own royal board proclaimed his hest, 490
 To put the guiltless Baptist, John, to death.

Eke Seneca a worthy sentence saith :—
 He saith he can but little diff'rence find
 Between a caitiff that has lost his mind
 And one that's fallen in a drunken fit, 495
 Except that madness o'er a bad man's wit
 Prevaileth longer than doth drunkenness.
 O gluttony, so full of cursedness,
 O thou first cause of man's confusión
 That brought upon us our damnation, 500
 Till Christ had bought us with his blood again !
 Behold, how dear, to speak it short and plain,
 Redeemed was that accurst iniquity !
 Corrupt grew all this world through gluttony ! . . . 504

These rioters, the three of whom I tell, 661

Long ere, at hour of prime, was rung the bell,
Were seated in a tavern, for to drink ;
And, as they sat, they heard a handbell clink
Before a corpse that tow'rds his grave was led. 665
The first of them then called his boy, and said :
" Go quickly, boy ! and soon return and say
Whose corpse is this that passes by the way ;
To bring me back his name now take good heed."

" Sir," quoth the boy, " to ask is little need ; 670
Two hours before you came, his name was told.
A friend was he of yours, a comrade old.
And suddenly he murdered was to-night
As on his bench he drunken sat upright.
There came a silent thief, whom men call Death, 675
Who all this country's people murdereth,
And with his spear he smote in twain his heart,
And straight without a word did thence depart.
He, in this pestilence, hath thousands slain ;
And, master, ere ye would his presence gain, 680
Methinks, ye well may deem it necessary
How to beware of such an adversary.
Be ready for to meet him evermore ;
My mother taught me thus ; I say no more."
" Saint Mary ! " quoth the host, was standing near, 685

"The child saith sooth ; for he hath slain this year,
 A mile hence, in a village ye may find,
 Both man and woman, child, and page, and hind.
 I trow, his habitation must be there.
 To be advisèd, a wisdom great it were, 690
 Ere that he brings dishonour on your head."
 "Yea ! by God's arms !" the reckless ruffian said,
 "Is it such peril with him for to meet ?
 I go to seek him both by way and street,
 I make my vow by God's most worthy bones ! 695
 Now hearken, comrades ! we are three at once ;
 Let each of us hold up his hand to other,
 And each of us become the others' brother ;
 So shall we slay this wilful traitor Death ;
 He who so many true men murdereth 700
 Himself shall die, by heaven ! ere it be night."

Therewith the three make haste their troths to plight,
 To live and die together, each for other,
 As though had each been born his fellow's brother.
 And in their drunken rage they all upstart, 705
 And forth towards the village straight depart
 Of which the taverner had told before ;
 And many a grisly oath they roundly swore,
 And Christ's dear body all in pieces rent :—

“Death shall be dead ; to find him are we bent.” 710

But scarcely had they gone the first half-mile,
When, as they would have mounted o’er a stile,
A poor old man encountered them right there.
This old man meekly gave them greeting fair,
And said:—“ With you, my lords, God’s favour be ! ” 715

The proudest of these reckless ruffians three
Replied:—“ What ails thee, churl, with sorry grace ?
Why art thou all wrapped up, except thy face ?
Why livest thou so long, and art so old ? ”

Therewith the old man did his face behold 720
And thus replied :—“ Because I cannot find
A man, yea ! though I walked to furthest Ind,
In village or in city great, forsooth,
Who for my age will give in change his youth ;
And therefore must I keep my old age still 725
As long a time as is my Maker’s will.
And Death declines to take my life, alas !
Thus, like a restless caitiff, here I pass,
And on the ground, which is my mother’s gate,
I knock still with my staff, both soon and late, 730
And say, ‘ My kindly mother, let me in !

See how I vanish, flesh, and blood, and skin !
Alas ! when will my bones be all at rest ?
With you, dear mother, would I change my chest
Of clothes, that in my chamber long hath been, 735
Yea ! for a cloth of hair to wrap me in ! '
But yet she will not do to me that grace ;
Wherefore full pale and wrinkled is my face.

But, sirs ! for you it is no courtesy
To offer one that's old contumely, 740
Unless he trespass first in word or deed.
In Holy Writ ye may yourselves well read,
' Before an old man with a hoary head
With rev'rence rise ; ' by good advice be led,
And to an old man see no harm ye do 745
No more than ye would men should do to you
In age, if ye so long on earth abide.
Now God be with you where ye roam or ride !
I must go thither where I have to go."

"Now nay, by heaven ! old churl ! thou shalt not so," 750
The second gamester answering spake anon ;
" Thou partest not so lightly, by saint John !
Thou spak'st e'en now of that false traitor Death,
That in this land our comrades murdereth.

Now hear my vow, and, as thou art his spy, 755
Say where he is, or be prepared to die,
By heav'n, and by the holy sacrament !
For truly, thou art one that dost consent
To slay us younger folk, deceitful thief ! ”

“Now, sirs ! ” quoth he, “if thus ye deem it lief 760
To seek for Death, turn up this crooked way ;
I left him late in yonder grove, I say,
Under a tree, and there will he abide ;
Nor, for your boasts against him, will he hide.
See ye that oak ? e'en there shall ye him find ! 765
God save you, He that once redeemed mankind,
And mend your ways ! ” So spake the gray-haired man.
And thereupon these gamesters swiftly ran
Till came they to the tree, and there they found
Of golden florins fine, new-coined and round, 770
Well nigh some eight full bushels, as they thought.
No longer then Death's hiding-place they sought,
But each of them so glad was of the sight,
Because the florins shone so fair and bright,
That down they sat beside the precious hoard. 775
The worst of them, he spake the foremost word.

“Take heed,” quoth he, “my brethren, what I say ;

My wit is great, howe'er I jest and play.
 This treasure Fortune us hath deigned to give,
 In mirth and jollity our lives to live ; 780
 Let's spend it lightly, as it lightly came.
 Who would have thought, by God's most holy name !
 That we should gain to-day so fair a grace ?
 But might this gold be carried from this place
 Home to my house, my friend, or else to yours— 785
 For well ye know that all this gold is ours—
 Then should we be in high felicity.
 But verily, by day this may not be ;
 For men would say we were for robbers known,
 And hang us for the treasure that's our own ! 790
 This treasure must be carried hence by night
 As wisely and as slily as it might.
 I counsel that the lot among us all
 Be drawn ; then see we where the lot will fall ;
 And he that draws the lot, with jocund heart 795
 Shall, quickly running, to the town depart,
 And bring us bread and wine full secretly.
 And two of us shall guard, all faithfully,
 This treasure well ; and if he will not tarry,
 When night is come, we may this treasure carry 800
 With one approved consent, where'er we list."
 Then one of them the lot held in his fist,

And bade them draw, and mark where it might fall.
It fell upon the youngest of them all ;
And forth towards the town he went anon. 805
And e'en as soon as ever he was gone,
The one of them thus spake unto the other :—
"Thou knowest well thou'rt sworn to be my brother ;
Thy profit will I tell thee right anon.
Thou knowest well our comrade hence is gone, 810
And here is gold, a full great quantity,
That is to be divided 'mongst us three.
But ne'ertheless, should I contrive anew
How it might be divided 'tween us two,
Should I not do a friendly turn to thee?" 815

"I know not how," said he, "that well may be.
He knows the gold remaineth with us two ;
What shall we say to him ? What must we do ?"

"Wilt keep a secret ?" said this evil man ;
"Then briefly will I tell you all my plan, 820
What we will do, to bring it all about."

"Agreed," the other said, "without a doubt ;
For, by my troth, I ne'er will prove untrue."

“Now,” quoth the first, “thou knowest we are two;
And two of us must stronger be than one. 825
Observe when he sits down, and right anon
Arise, as though thou’dst strive with him in play;
And in his side I’ll stab him, as I may,
Whilst that thou strugglest with him as in game;
And with thy dagger see thou do the same. 830
And then shall all this gold divided be,
My dearest friend, between thyself and me.
Then may we both our pleasures all fulfil,
And play at dice all at our own sweet will.”
And thus consented have these ruffians twain 835
To slay the third, as ye have heard full plain.

The youngest one, that went towards the town,
Full oft in heart he rolleth up and down
The beauty of these florins new and bright.
“O Lord!” quoth he, “if so were that I might 840
Have all this treasure to myself alone,
There is no man that liveth ’neath the throne
Of God, that then should live as merry as I!”
And at the last the fiend, our enemy,
Put in his thought, some poison he should buy, 845
Wherewith to cause his comrades twain to die;
For, ah! the fiend hath found him living so

That he had leave to bring his soul to woe ;
And this was verily his full intent,
To slay them both, and never to repent. 850
And forth he goes, nor longer would he tarry,
Within the town, to an apothecáry,
Requesting him, he would forthwith him sell
Some poison, that he might some rats expel ;
And eke a polecat was in his domain, 855
That, as he said, his capons oft had slain ;
And fain would he have vengeance, if he might,
On vermin, that annoyed him oft by night.

Th' apothecáry answered :—" Thou shalt have
A mixture that, as God my soul shall save, 860
In all this world no creature can be found
That eats or drinks of what I here compound
As much as equals but a grain of wheat,
But straightway with the loss of life shall meet ;
Yea ! die he must ! and that in lesser while 865
That thou canst go at footpace scarce a mile ;
This poison is so strong and violent."

This wicked man within his hand hath pent
This poison in a box, and straightway ran
Unto the nearest street, unto a man, 870

Of whom he borrowed large-sized vessels three.
And in the twain his poison poured hath he ;
The third for his own drinking kept he clean.
For all the night to labour did he mean
In carrying all the treasure from the place. 875
And when this rioter, forlorn of grace,
Had filled with wine his weighty bottles three,
Back to his comrades straight repaireth he.

What needeth it to speak about it more ?
For e'en as they had plann'd his death before, 880
E'en so have they him slain, and that anon.
And when this was accomplished, spake the one :—
“ Now let us sit and drink, and make us merry ;
And afterward will we his body bury.”
And with that word it chanced to be his case 885
To take a bottle where the poison was,
And drank, and gave his comrade drink beside ;
Whereby anon these wicked robbers died.
And truly, I suppose that Avicén
Wrote never in the ‘ Canon ’ or in ‘ Fen ’ 890
More wondrous symptoms of empoisoning
That had these wretches ere their perishing.
Thus ended are these cursèd homicides,
And eke the treacherous poisoner besides. 894

THE CLERK'S TALE

7

Tell us some merry thing of real events ; 15
Your terms, your phrases, and your ornaments,
Keep them in store until ye shall endite
In lofty style, as when to kings you write.
And speak so plainly for the nonce, I pray,
That we may understand whate'er you say." 20

This worthy clerk benignly him addressed,
"My host," quoth he, "I bow beneath your hest.
The guidance of us all is laid on you,
And therefore render I obedience due,
As far as reason rules us, heartily. 25
To you will I relate a tale that I
Once learnt, at Padua, of a worthy clerk,
As proved is by his words and by his work.
He now is dead and nailed within his chest,
I pray that God receive his soul to rest ! 30

Francesco Petrarch, poet laureate,
This clerk was named, whose rhetoric so great
Illumined Italy with poetry,
As Linian did with his philosophy
Or law, or other art he knew so well. 35
But death, that will not grant us here to dwell
But as it were a twinkling of an eye,

Hath slain them both ; and we shall likewise die.

To tell you further of this worthy man,
(Who taught me all the tale) as I began, 40
I say, that first in high style he enditeth,
Ere he the body of his story writeth,
A proem, where the site describeth he
Of Piedmont, and Saluzzo's boundary,
And speaks of Apennines, the mountains high, 45
That form the bounds of western Lombardy.
And first of Monte Viso doth he tell,
Where, issuing from its spring, a little well,
The Po, that mighty river, takes its source,
And eastward, still increasing in its course, 50
Emilia, Ferrara, Venice sees ;
All which would take too long to tell at ease.
And certainly—for so my judgement deems—
Methinks a thing irrelevant it seems,
Save that he would his learning should appear ;— 55
And this the Tale is, which ye now shall hear.

PART I

Here beginneth the Tale of the Clerk of Oxford.

TOWARDS the west of Italy is seen,
Hard by the base of Monte Viso cold,
A pleasant plain, of fertile soil and green,
Where many a tower and town thou mayst behold, 60
That founded were in days of princes old,
And many another prospect known to fame ;
Saluzzo was this noble country's name.

A marquis once was lord of all that land,
As were his worthy ancestors before ; 65
Devoted, true, and ready to his hand
Were all his loving subjects, less and more ;
Thus in delight he liveth evermore,
Beloved and dreaded, such his favoured fate,
Both by his lords and men of low estate. 70

And therewithal, to speak of lineage,
Was he the noblest born in Lombardy ;
Full fair of person, strong and young of age,
And full of honour and of courtesy ;
Discreet to rule his principality,
Save that in some respects he was to blame ;
And Walter was this youthful prince's name.

75

In this I blame him ; he considereth not
In future time what chance may him betide ;
(But all on present pleasure set his thought,)
To hawk, or hunt the deer on every side ;
Well nigh all other actions let he slide ;
And eke he would not (which was worst of all)
(Wed any wife, for aught that might befall.)

80

But on this point his people felt so sore
That to his presence once they thronging went ;
And one of them, the wisest deemed in lore,
Or one to whom the lord would best assent
As fit to tell him what his people meant,
Or else could best the people's wish make clear,
Unto the marquis spake as ye shall hear.

85

90

“ O noble marquis ! your humanity
Assures us all and gives us hardiness,

As oft as time is of necessity,
That we should tell you what is our distress ; 95
Now, gracious lord ! receive with gentleness
The plea wherein our woeful hearts complain,
And never let your ears my voice disdain.

Although I have not in this matter here
More int'rest than have others in this place, 100
Yet forasmuch as ye, my lord so dear,
Have always showed me favour and good grace,
I dare more boldly ask of you a space
Of audience, to express our full request ;
Then may ye do, my lord, what seemeth best. 105

For truly, lord, so great delight we take
In you and all your work alway, that we
Could never of ourselves proposal make
Whereby to live in more felicity ;
Save only this, that, if your will it be, 110
To be a wedded man it might you please ;
Then were your people's hearts in fullest ease.

Submit you to that yoke of happy fate
That sovereignty, not servitude implies,
Which men call marriage or the wedded state ; 115

And think, amongst your meditations wise,
In various acts how fast our lifetime flies ;
For though we sleep or wake, or roam or ride,
Still flies the time, and will for no man bide.

And though your youth now flourisheth so green, 120'
In slily creepeth age, as still as stone ;
Death threateneth every age, and strikes unseen
At every rank, from whom escapeth none.
And, just as surely as we know each one
That we must die, uncertain are we all 125
Of that sure day when death shall on us fall.

Accept ye then our humble true intent
Who evermore your gracious hests embrace,
And we will, lord, if so be ye assent,
Choose you a wife within a little space, 130
Born of the noblest and most wealthy race
Of all this land ; so that our choice may seem
To honour God and you, as best we deem.

From all this anxious fear your subjects rid,
And take a wife, for all the country's sake ; 135
For if it so befell—which God forbid—
That, through your death, your line an end should make,

And that a strange inheritor should take
Your heritage, 'twere woe to all alive !
Wherefore we pray you hastily to wive ! ” 140

Their humble prayer and their submissive cheer
Inclined the marquis to receive their plea.
“Ye will,” quoth he, “my faithful people dear,
To that I never thought of counsel me ;
Till now rejoiced I in my liberty, 145
That seldom in the marriage-state is found ;
Where I was free, ye now would have me bound.

But none the less I see your true intent,
And in your wisdom put my trust alway ;
Wherefore of my free will I here consent 150
To wed a wife, as soon as e'er I may.
But whereas ye have proffered me to-day
To choose my wife, therein will I release
Your choice, and pray you from that offer cease.

For God doth know, that children oft indeed 155
Are all unlike the parents whence they grew ;
All goodness is of God, not from the breed
Whereof they are engendered and ensue ;
In God's great goodness trust I, wherefore too

My marriage and my future state and rest 160
To Him I leave, to guide me for the best.

Let me alone in choosing of my wife ;
That charge upon my back will I endure ;
But this I pray, and charge you on your life,
Whatever wife I take, ye shall be sure 165
(To worship her, whilst that her life may dure,)
In word and work, both here and everywhere,
As if the daughter of a king she were.

And furthermore, this shall ye swear, that ye
Against my choice shall ne'er complain or strive ; 170
For since I must forgo my liberty
At your request, know, as I hope to thrive,
Where'er my heart is set, there will I wive ;
Unless ye will assent as I declare,
I pray you speak no more of this affair." 175

With hearty will they swear it, and assent
To all this matter ; no man said him nay ;
Beseeching as a favour, ere they went,
That he would grant to name a certain day
For his espousal, soon as e'er he may ; 180
For still the people somewhat stood in dread
Lest this young marquis would no consort wed.

/ He granted them a day, as seemed him best,)
Whereon he would be wedded certainly,
And said, he did all this at their request ; 185
And they with humble hearts, obediently,
Kneeling upon their knees full reverently
All give him thanks, and thus they gain the end
Of their desire, and home again they wend.

And hereupon unto his household all 190
He gives commands a banquet to purvey ;
And for his knights and squires doth quickly call,
And shows what duties he would on them lay.
And they with joy his every hest obey ;
And each of them doth all his diligence 195
To do unto the feast true reverence.

Here endeth the First Part, and begins the Second.

PART II

NOT far from that same palace honourable
Wherein this marquis bade the feast prepare,
A hamlet stood, of site delectable,
Wherein the people of the village there 200
Their stables and their cottages did share ;
And gained their living by their works afield
E'en as the earth did its abundance yield.

Amongst these needy folk there dwelt a man,
Considered as the poorest of them all ; 205
But righteous God can send, if such His plan,
His grace unto a little ox's stall ;
This man Janicula his neighbours call.
A daughter had he, fair enough of hue ;
And as Griselda men the maiden knew. 210

(But if we speak of beauty of the mind,
The fairest maid was she beneath the sun ;
For, nursed in poverty severely kind,
No wanton fancies through her heart had run ;
And oftener of the well than of the tun 215
She drank ; and since she fain would Virtue please,
She well knew labour, but no idle ease.

But though of tender age, this maiden yet
Within the breast of her virginity
A judgement ripe and wise had firmly set ; 220
And with great reverence and charity
Her poor old father duly fostered she ;
A few sheep, while she span, afield she kept ;
She wished not to be idle till she slept.

And when she homeward came, she with her brought 225
Some worts or herbs full many a time and oft,
The which she shred and seethed, and pottage wrought,
And made her bed full hard and nowise soft ;
And aye she kept her father's life aloft
With every art of kindly diligence 230
That child may do in father's reverence.

Upon Griselda, creature poor but fair,
Full oftentimes this marquis set his eye

As he to ride a-hunting would repair ;
And when it happened that he might her spy, 235
He with no wanton glance or foolish sigh
Would gaze on her, but soberly indeed
Of her demeanour would he take good heed,

Commending in his heart her woman's air,
And eke her virtue, passing every wight 240
Of age so young, in look and action fair.
For though his people have no special sight
For virtue, he considered hath aright
Her goodness, and resolved to wed indeed
No woman else, whene'er to wed was need. 245

The day of wedding came, but no one can
Discern what woman should his consort be ;
And at this marvel wondered many a man ;
They said, whene'er their private speech was free,
" Will not our lord yet leave his vanity ? 250
Will he not wed ? Alas ! alas the while !
Why will he thus himself and us beguile ? "

But ne'ertheless this marquis bade them make
Of gems, well set in gold and azure bright,
Brooches and rings, for fair Griselda's sake ; 255

And for her clothing measured her aright
By means of one that seemed her very height ;
Procuring other decorations all
That unto such a wedding should befall.

The middle-morning of the very day 260
Approaches, when this wedding was to be ;
And all the palace put was in array,
Both hall and chamber, each in its degree ;
There men the offices well crammed may see
With plenty of the daintiest food that e'er 265
In Italy could well be counted rare.

This royal marquis, splendidly arrayed,
With lords and ladies in his company,
Who to attend the banquet had been prayed,
With bachelors-in-arms and chivalry, 270
And many a sound of sundry melody,
Towards the village of the which I told,
In this array, the nearest way they hold.

Griseld of this, God knows, full innocent
That for her sake was formed this great array, 275
To fetch some water to a fountain went,
And cometh home as soon as e'er she may.

For well had she heard said, that very day
The marquis was to wed ; and if she might,
She fain would somewhat see of that fair sight. 280

She thought—" I will with other maidens stand
That be my fellows, at the door, and see
The marchioness ; and now must take in hand
To do at home, as soon as it may be,
The labour that as usual falls to me ; 285
And then may I at leisure her behold,
If she this way towards the castle hold."

And as she o'er the threshold scarce had gone,
The marquis came, and her began to call ;
And she set down her water-pot anon, 290
Beside the threshold, in an ox's stall ;
And down upon her knees began to fall ;
And with a patient mien she kneeleth still
Till she should hear what was her master's will.

This thoughtful marquis spake unto this maid 295
Full soberly, and said as ye shall hear :—
" Griseld, where is your father ? " thus he said ;
And she, with reverent and humble cheer,
" My lord, all ready," answered him, " and near."

And in without delay she quickly goes, 300
And to the marquis soon her father shows.

Then by the hand he took this aged man,
And thus he spake, while drawing him aside,
“Janicula, I neither may nor can
Longer the pleasure that I hope for hide. 305
If so be thou vouchsafe, whate’er betide,
Thy daughter will I take, e’er home I wend,
To be my wife, until my life shall end.

I know the love thou dost for me display,
Who art my faithful liege-man evermore ; 310
And all that pleaseth me, I well dare say,
It pleaseth thee, and specially therefore
Tell me the point whereof I spake before,
If that thou wilt unto that purpose draw,
Henceforth to take me for thy son-in-law ? ” 315

This sudden chance this man astonied so
That red he grew, abashed, and quaking all
He stood, and scarcely could his answer show,
But only said :—“My will ye well may call
Your own, my lord, nor can your humble thrall 320
Your will oppose ; my lord are ye, so dear ;
E’en as you please, decide this matter here.”

“Yet will I,” quoth this marquis tenderly,
“That in thy chamber thou and I and she
A conference shall hold ; and know’st thou why ? 325
I fain would ask her if her will may be
To be my wife, obedient still to me.
And all this shall be done while thou art near ;
I would not say a word thou canst not hear.”

And while they in the chamber were about 330
This conference, as ye shall after hear,
The people came around the house without,
And wondered how with reverential cheer,
And carefully, she kept her father dear.
And utterly Griselda wonder might, 335
Who ne’er before had seen so great a sight.

No wonder is it though she were amazed
To see so great a guest approach the place ;
On guest like this she never yet had gazed,
And therefore looked adown with pallid face. 340
But briefly forward in my tale to pace,
These are the very words the marquis said
To this benign and truly faithful maid.

“Griseld,” he said, “ye well may understand,
It pleaseth both your father dear and me 345

That I shall wed you ; and it so may stand,
As I suppose, ye will that this shall be.
But first some questions would I ask," quoth he,
"That, since this shall be done this hasty way,
Will you assent, or plead for some delay ? 350

I ask you, are ye ready, with good heart,
To do my will, so that I freely may
E'en at my pleasure cause you joy or smart,
While ye make no complaint, by night or day ?
And eke, when I say 'yea,' ne'er say me 'nay' 355
Either by word or proud disdainful air ?
Swear this, and I to our alliance swear."

Still wondering at his speech, and filled with dread,
She said :—"My lord, through my indignity
I feel how great the honour, thee to wed. 360
But as ye will yourself, right so will I.
And here I swear, that never, willingly,
In work or thought will I you disobey,
E'en though obedience should my life betray."

"This is enough, Griselda mine," quoth he ; 365
And forth he goes with calm and sober cheer
Out at the door, and after him came she.

Then spake he to the people thronging near,
"This is my wife," quoth he, "that standeth here.
True love and honour yield to her, I pray, 370
For love of me ; no more have I to say."

And lest her sorry garments, poor and bare,
Should to his palace be conveyed, he bade
That women should unclothe her even there ;
Whereat these ladies seemed but little glad 375
The clothes to handle that her coarsely clad.
But ne'ertheless this maiden bright of hue
From head to foot they wholly clothed anew.

Her flowing hair they combed, that lay untressed
All loosely, and with fingers delicate 380
Her forehead with a coronet they dressed,
And covered her with jewels small and great.
Why should I longer her array relate ?
The people, for her beauty, scarce her knew
When richly she was thus arrayed anew. 385

The marquis soon his wedded faith did plight
With ring made for the purpose, and her set
Upon a horse, well-ambling and snow-white,
And to his palace fair, without a let,

With joyful crowds that for her welcome met, 390
Conveyed her home, and thus the day they spend
In revel, till the sun began descend.

And briefly further in this tale to pace,
I say that to this youthful marchioness
God hath such favour granted, of His grace, 395
That no man would have guessed the likeliness
That she was born and bred in rude distress,
As in a cot or in an ox's stall,
But nourished rather in an emperor's hall.

To every wight she soon hath grown so dear 400
And worshipful, that folk where she was born,
And from her birth had known her year by year,
Could scarce believe it, but they durst have sworn
That to Janicula, so poor and lorn,
She ne'er was daughter, but, so great her grace, 405
She seemed a creature of another race.

For though that ever virtuous was she,
She now had so increased in excellence
Of noble merit and benignity,
Discreet withal, and fair of eloquence, 410
So gentle and deserving reverence,

And could so well the hearts of men embrace,
That all men loved her who beheld her face.

Not only in Saluzzo's noble town
Was published wide the goodness of her name, 415
But eke beside, in many a región,
If one spake well, another spake the same ;
So spread of her benignity the fame,
That men and women, young as well as old,
Would seek the town, her person to behold. 420

Thus Walter lowly—rather, royally—
With honour wedded, fortunate and free,
In peace divine now liveth easily
At home, and outward grace enough had he ;
And, as he saw that under low degree 425
True virtue might be hid, the folks him own
A prudent man ; and such are seldom known.

Not only this Griselda, by her wit,
Knew all the tasks of wifely homeliness,
But eke, whene'er the case demanded it, 430
The people's profit could she well redress.
No discord rose, or strife, or heaviness
In all that land, but she could soon appease
And wisely bring them all in rest and ease.

Though that her husband absent were anon, 435
If gentlemen, or men of low degree
Were wroth, she soon could set them all at one ;
Such wise advice and words mature had she,
And judgements of so great an equity,
That sent she seemed from heaven, said every wight, 440
To help mankind and every wrong to right.

No long time after this Griselda fair
Had wedded been, a daughter fair she bore ;
She sooner would have borne a son and heir ;
But none the less it gladdened less and more. 445
For though a maiden child may come before,
She yet, by likelihood, may bear a boy,
Not being barren, to complete their joy.

Here endeth the Second Part, and begins the Third.

PART III

IT happened, as has happened oft before
That, when this child had sucked not many a day, 450
This marquis in his heart did long so sore
To tempt his wife, her firmness to assay,
That all in vain he strove to cast away
This marvelous desire, his wife to try ;
What need to fright her from her constancy ? 455

He had enough assayed her oft before,
And found her ever good. What needed it
To tempt her thus, and alway more and more ?
Though some men praise him for his subtle wit,
I say, for my part, that 'tis all unfit 460
To tempt a wife when need is nowise near,
By putting her in anguish and in fear.

This marquis therefore wrought as ye shall hear ;
He came alone by night to where she lay,
With visage stern and with a troubled cheer, 465
And thus he spake :—" Griseld," quoth he, " that day
Whereon I took you from your poor array
And set you in estate of nobleness,
Ye scarcely have forgotten, as I guess.

I say, Griseld, this present dignity, 470
Wherein that I have set you, as I trow,
Ne'er maketh you forgetful for to be
I took you from a poor estate and low,
Where little hope of wealth you well could know ;
Take heed how every word I speak is true, 475
There is no wight that hears it, save us two.

Ye know yourself full well, how came ye here,
Into this house ; it is not long ago ;
And though to me indeed ye be full dear,
Unto my nobles ye are nowise so ; 480
They say—to them 'tis only shame and woe
To be so subject, in subservient state,
To thee, that wast a village-maid of late.

And since thy daughter's birth, especially,
To speak such words as these they seldom cease ; 485

But I desire, as hitherto, to be
Their friend, and live with them in rest and peace ;
I must not carelessly such harm increase ;
I must do with thy daughter for the best,
Not as I would, but at the people's hest. 490

And yet, God knows, full loath is this to me ;
But ne'ertheless, except I tell you all,
I nought will do ; but this I wish," quoth he,
"That ye assent to this that must befall.
Show by your deeds your patience ye recall 495
Whereby ye promised surely to abide
That day that first our marriage did decide."

On hearing this, no change came o'er her face,
She altered not in tone, or mien, or eyes,
But seemed as if she felt of grief no trace. 500
She said, "My lord, all in your pleasure lies ;
My child and I, in most obedient wise,
Are wholly yours ; and ye can save or kill
That which is all your own—then work your will.

There nothing is—as God my soul shall save ! 505
That pleases you, that may disquiet me.
Nor aught is that I may desire to have

Or ever dread to lose, save only ye !
This will is in my heart, and aye shall be.
No length of time or death may this deface, 510
Nor true devotion from my mind displace."

Glad was this marquis of her answer meek,
But yet he feigned as if he were not so ;
Severe his aspect was, and pale his cheek
When that he from the chamber turned to go. 515
Soon after this, in half an hour, I trow,
He secretly hath told his whole intent
Unto a man, whom to his wife he sent.

A kind of sergeant was this silent man,
Whom oftentimes he trusty found and true 520
In great affairs ; such folk as these well can
Swift execution on the evil do ;
His lord well knew he loved and feared him too.
And when this sergeant learnt his master's will,
Into her chamber stalked he, slow and still. 525

"Madam," he said, "ye must forgive it me,
Though I do that whereto I am constrained ;
By wise experience well aware are ye,
Performing lords' commands must not be feigned ;

They may lamented be, but not disdained ; 530
For man his master's will must needs obey,
And so must I ; no more remains to say.

This child am I commanded for to take"—
And spake no more ; the child away he rent
Unpityingly, and some pretence did make 535
As though he would have slain it ere he went.
Griselda still must suffer and consent ;
(And like a lamb she sitteth, meek and still,)
And let this cruel sergeant work his will.

Suspicious was the nature of this man ; 540
His face suspicious, and his speech and air ;
The hour suspicious when he this began.
Alas ! her dearest daughter, loved and fair !
She deemed he would have slain it even there.
But ne'ertheless she neither wept nor sighed, 545
But with her lord's commandment still complied.

Yet at the last to speak she thus began,
And to this cruel sergeant meekly prayed,
That, as he was a worthy gentleman,
She might her daughter kiss, to death betrayed ; 550
And in her lap this little child she laid

With full sad face, and oft the child did kiss,
And soothed it, and commended it to bliss.

And thus she spake, with gentle voice and mind,
“Farewell, my child! thy face I ne’er shall see; 555
But now that with the cross I thee have signed,
So mayst thou by the Saviour blessèd be
That died for man’s sake on a cross of tree.
To Him thy soul, dear daughter, I commend,
For thou, for my sake, hast to-night thine end.” 560

E’en to a nurse in such a case, I trow,
It had been hard this rueful sight to see;
Well might a mother then have cried for woe;
But ne’ertheless so firm of mind was she,
That she endured extreme adversity, 565
And to the sergeant thus she meekly said,
“Take here again your young and tender maid.

Go now,” quoth she, “and do my lord’s request;
But one thing yet I pray you, of your grace,
That, save ye be forbidden by his hest, 570
Bury this body in some secret place
Where beast or bird may ne’er its form deface.”
But he no answer in reply would say,
But took the child, and went upon his way.

This sergeant came unto his lord again, 575
And of Griselda's words and of her cheer
He told him point by point, in language plain,
And him presenteth with his daughter dear.
Some signs of pity in this lord appear ;
But ne'ertheless his purpose held he still, 580
As lords will do, when they would have their will ;

And bade his sergeant that, all secretly,
He shortly must this child enwrap with care,
With every due protection, tenderly,
And in a panner or a scarf it bear ; 585
But, lest his head he forfeit then and there,
That no man shall be told of his intent,
Nor whence he came, nor whither that he went.

But at Bologna, to his sister dear,
Who Pánago as countess did possess, 590
He straight should tell the tale, and bid her hear,
Beseeching her to do her business
This child to foster in all gentleness ;
And whose child that it was, he prayed her hide
From every wight, for aught that may betide. 595

This sergeant goes, and hath fulfilled this thing ;
But to the marquis now return will we.

For now he watching goes, examining
If by his wife's demeanour he could see,
Or by her utterance perceive, that she 600
Was altered ; such he never her could find,
But still she seemed the same, serene and kind ;

As glad, as meek, as prompt as in her lies,
And eke in love all she was wont to be
Continued she to him in every wise. 605
Nor of her daughter e'er a word spake she.
No sign of mourning for adversity
Was seen in her ; and ne'er her daughter's name
She named aloud, in earnest or in game.

Here endeth the Third Part. The Fourth Part follows.

PART IV

IN such a manner passed four years or more 610
Ere she with child was ; and by God's decree,
A son and heir she to the marquis bore,
A child in virtues rich, and fair to see ;
Which when his father knew, not only he
But all the country round their hearts upraise 615
For sake of this, and render God their praise.

When it was two years old, and from the breast
Was taken of his nurse, upon a day
This marquis once again the wish possessed
To tempt his wife still further, if he may. 620
What needed it her firmness to assay ?
| But wedded men no measure know, I fear, |
| When thus a wife's endurance doth appear. |

"Wife," said this marquis, "ye have heard before
My people take our marriage much amiss ; 625
And since to me a son and heir ye bore,
In all our lives 'twas never worse than this.
Their muttering daunts my heart and mars my bliss ;
For to my ears their murmurs seem so rude
That well nigh all my courage is subdued. 630

For now they say—"When Walter hence is gone,
Then will the blood of Janicle succeed
To be our lord ; for other heir is none.'
My people say such words as these indeed ;
Well ought I of such murmurs take good heed ; 635
For certainly I dread such insolence,
Though not said plainly in mine audience.

I fain would live in peace, if so I might,
And therefore am determined utterly,
E'en as his sister once I served by night, 640
Right so I think to serve him secretly.
Of this I warn you, lest all suddenly
Out of their wonted calm your feelings stray ;
Be patient and endure your fate, I pray ! "

"I have," quoth she, "said this, and ever shall, 645
I nought desire, nor will from aught refrain,

Save at your will ; it grieves me not at all
Though that my daughter and my son be slain,
Provided your commandment so ordain.
I in our children have no part, I trow, 650
Save sickness first, and after pain and woe.

Our lord are ye ; deal therefore with your own
Right as ye would ; no counsel ask of me.
For as I left my clothes and came alone
When first I came to you, e'en so," quoth she, 655
| "I left behind my will and liberty, |
And took your clothing ; wherefore now, I pray,
Do all your will ; in all things I obey.

And truly, if I had the prescience
To know your will ere ye your wishes told, 660
I fain would do it, free from negligence :
But now I know the wishes ye unfold,
I firm and stable all your pleasure hold.
For knew I that my death would give you ease,
Right gladly would I die, your will to please. 665

| For death can show no true comparison
Beside your love." And when he spied alway
His wife's firm constancy, he cast adown

His ruthless eyes, and wondered how she may
In patience suffer all this sore dismay, 670
And forth with saddened look did straight depart ;
But felt a secret pleasure in his heart.

This ugly sergeant in the selfsame wise
As he her daughter caught, so likewise he,
Or in worse way, if man can worse devise, 675
Hath caught her son, so full of grace and glee ;
And all the while so patient still was she,
That she no token gave of heaviness,
But kissed her child, and after did it bless.

Save only this—she prayed him, if he might, 680
Her little son full deep in earth to grave,
His tender limbs, so delicate to sight,
From birds or beasts of rapine for to save ;
But she from him might nowise answer have.
He went his way as if he recked of naught, 685
But to Bologna tenderly it brought.

This marquis wondereth ever more and more
To see her patience ; and, except that he
So certainly had ascertained before
How perfectly her children cherished she, 690

He would have weened that for some subtlety,
For very malice or a cruel heart,
With steadfast look she suffered all this smart.

But well he knew that next himself in truth
She loved her children best in every way. 695
But now of women would I ask, forsooth,
If such sore trials might not bid him stay ?
Why should a stubborn husband still essay
To prove her wifhood and her steadfastness,
While he continues still in stubbornness ? 700

But there are certain men of such a mould
That, when upon a course they once decide,
They cannot from their strong desire withhold ;
But, like to one that to a stake is tied,
They ne'er will let their first intention slide. 705
E'en so this marquis fully hath proposed
To tempt his wife, as he was first disposed.

He watcheth, if by word or countenance
She might some change in heart or spirit show ;
But never could he find a variance ; 710
In heart or look no difference might he know ;

And still, as older she would daily grow,
The truer still—if possible—she strove
To prove herself in faithfulness and love.

And therefore it appeared that in the twain 715
There was but *one* will ; what was Walter's hest,
That very end would she desire to gain ;
And—God be praised !—all happened for the best.
She plainly showed that ne'er, to shun unrest,
(A wife should, of herself, express desires 720
For aught but what her husband most requires.)

The scandal spread of Walter oft and wide
That, with a cruel heart, he wickedly,
Because he wedded had a village-bride,
Had murdered both his children secretly ; 725
Such rumour rose amongst them commonly.
No wonder, for unto the people's ear
There came no word but that they murdered were.

And therefore, whereas all his folk before
Had loved him well, this slander of his fame 730
Converted them to hate him yet the more ;
To be a murderer is a hateful name.
But ne'ertheless, for earnest or for game,

He from his cruel course would ne'er relent ;
To tempt his wife was now his sole intent. 735

When that his daughter now was twelve years old,
He at the court of Rome (in subtle wise
Informed of his intent) his message told,
Commanding them a charter to devise
As best might speed his cruel enterprise, 740
How that the pope, as for his people's good,
Bade him to wed another, if he would.

I say, he bade his agents counterfeit
Bulls from the pope, as making mention
That he hath leave his marriage to delete, 745
As by the Father's dispensation,
To stay all rancour and dissension
Betwixt his folk and him ; so said the bull,
The which they soon have published all in full.

The common people, as no wonder is, 750
Full well supposed the case had been right so ;
But to Griselda when they spake of this,
I deem that in her heart was heavy woe.
But she, remaining steadfast 'neath the blow,
Was resolute, this creature schooled in pain, 755
Th' adversity of fortune to sustain ;

Abiding still his pleasure and his will
To whom she—heart and all—was given by fate
As all-sufficient her desires to fill ;
But shortly all this story to relate, 760
This marquis secretly hath written straight
A letter showing all his full intent,
Which to Bologna secretly was sent.

The earl of Pánago, who years before
Wedded his sister, prayed he specially 765
To bring his two fair children home once more,
With honourable state, all openly.
But one thing he implored him utterly,
That he to no man, though they oft enquire,
Would tell what noble was these children's sire; 770

But say, the maiden young should wedded be
Unto the marquis of Saluce anon.
And as this earl was asked to do, did he ;
He chose a day, and on his way is gone
Towards Saluce, with nobles many a one, 775
In rich array, this maiden sweet to guide,
Her little brother riding close beside.

Arrayed for marriage, glorious to behold,
Was this fair maid, bedecked with jewels clear ;

Her brother, which that was but seven years old, 780
Was likewise richly clad in noble gear.
And thus with splendour and with joyful cheer,
Towards Saluzzo as their course they guide,
From day to day they safely forward ride.

Here endeth the Fourth Part. The Fifth Part follows.

PART V

AMONG all this, beside his acts unkind, 785
The marquis, fain to tempt his wife yet more,
To prove th' endurance of her constant mind,
And by experience fully to explore
If still she were as steadfast as before,
He, on a day, in audience of the court, 790
Spake openly in this unkindly sort :—

“Griseld, my pleasure has been truly great
In choosing you my wife for worthiness,
For open truth and meek obedient state,
Not for your lineage or your wealth's excess ; 795
But now I know, in very soothfastness,
That in great lordship, as my fears advise,
There is great servitude, in sundry wise.

I may not do as every ploughman may ;
My people would constrain me for to take 800
Another wife, complaining day by day ;
And eke the pope, for reconcilment's sake,
Consenteth, as I well can undertake ;
And truly, thus much will I freely say,
My future wife is hastening on her way. 805

Be strong of heart, anon vacate her place ;
As for the dower that ye brought to me,
Receive it back, I grant it of my grace ;
Return now to your father's house," quoth he ;
" No man can always know prosperity ; 810
With even heart I counsel you to bear
This stroke of fortune or unlooked for care."

And she replied again in patience :—
" My lord," quoth she, " I know, and knew alway
How that between your high magnificence 815
And my poor station no man can or may
Make due comparison ; let none say nay.
I ne'er esteemed me of sufficient grade
To be your wife, nor e'en your chamber-maid.

And here, where ye as lady bade me live— 820
Here, in the sight of God, I well confess,

As surely as may He my soul receive—
I held me ne'er as lady, questionless,
But humble servant to your worthiness ;
And alway, while my life endureth, will 825
Above all earthly creatures serve you still.

That ye so long, of your benignity,
Have shown me honour and renown alway,
Set where I was not worthy for to be,
I thank both you and God, to whom I pray 830
You to requite ; no more remains to say.
Unto my father will I gladly wend,
And dwell with him until my life shall end.

Where I was fostered from a child so small
Will I the remnant of my life conclude, 835
A widow clean, in body, heart, and all ;
For since I gave to you my maidenhood,
And am your very wife, as seemed you good,
May God forbid the wife of such a lord
Should with a second husband make accord ! 840

As for your future wife, the God of grace
Grant you true welfare and prosperity ;
For gladly will I yield to her my place,

Wherein I was so blissful wont to be ;
For since it pleaseth you, my lord," quoth she, 845
" Who whilom were my heart's and spirit's rest,
That I shall go, I go when seemeth best.

But when ye proffer me that dowry fair
I brought you first, I bear it well in mind,
It was my wretched clothing, poor and bare, 850
The which for me were hard now for to find !
O gracious God ! how gentle and how kind
Ye seemed, to judge by loving speech and look,
The day when ye Griseld in marriage took !

But sooth is said, at least I find it true, 855
For in sad earnest is it proved in me—
' Love is not, when 'tis old, as when 'tis new.'
Yet truly, lord, for no adversity,
E'en though I come to die, it shall not be
That e'er in word or work shall I repent 860
I gave you all my heart with true intent.

My lord, ye know that in my father's place
Ye bade them strip me of my dress so rude,
And clothe me there right nobly, of your grace ;
I brought you nothing else, as seemed you good, 865

But faith and nakedness and maidenhood ;
And here again my clothing I restore,
And eke my wedding-ring, for evermore.

The remnant of your jewels ready be
Within your chamber, may I well maintain ; 870
Naked from out my father's house," quoth she,
"I came, and naked must return again.
To follow all your pleasure am I fain ;
But yet I hope it be not your intent
That from your palace I all smockless went. } 875

Wherefore, in guerdon of my maidenhood,
Which here I brought, not hence again to bear,
I pray, vouchsafe to give me, for my good, 885
E'en such a smock as I was wont to wear,
That I may clothe therewith the form of her
That was your wife ; and here I take my leave
Of you, my own good lord, lest you I grieve."

"Thesmock," quoth he, "thou on thy back dost wear, 890
There be it still, and bear it forth with thee."
But scarce could he aloud his will declare,
But went his way for sorrowing sympathy.
Before the folk her clothes off-strippeth she,

And in her smock, with head and foot all bare, 895
Towards her father's house begins to fare.

The folk her follow, weeping as they go,
And curse dame Fortune for the mischief done ;
But she no starting tear allowed to flow,
And in this trying time her words were none ; 900
Her father, who these tidings heard anon,
Doth curse the day and hour when nature's plan
Shaped him to breathe on earth as living man.

For surely, past all doubt, this poor old man
Suspected lest her marriage ill should prove ; 905
And ever deemed, e'en since it first began,
That, when this lord had satisfied his love,
'Twould seem disparagement he thus should move
From high estate, so meanly to alight ;
Then would he cast her off as best he might. 910

To meet his daughter hastily goes he,
For he by noise of folk discerned her near ;
And with her former dress, as best might be,
He covereth her, with many a bitter tear ;
But scarce could clothe her in this humble gear ; 915
For rude the cloth was, and of older date
By many days than when she changed her state.

Thus with her father for a certain space
Dwelleth this flower of wifely patience ;
And neither by her converse nor her face, 920
Before the folk, or when they parted thence,
Betrayed she that to her was done offence ;
Nor of her late high rank remembrance keen
She showed, as by her countenance was seen.

No wonder ; for, when in her high estate, 925
Her spirit dwelt in pure humility ;
No palate nice, nor heart too delicate,
Nor pomp was hers, nor show of royalty ;
But full was she of sweet benignity,
Discreet and honourable, and void of pride, 930
And meekly to her husband true did bide.

Men speak of Job, and most for humbleness,
As clerks, when so they list, can well endite
Of patient men ; but, as for truthfulness,
Though clerks in praise of women seldom write, 935
There can no man in humbleness delight
As woman can, nor can be half as true
As women are ; unless the case is new.

PART VI

PANAGO'S earl from far Bologna came,
Whose name was spread abroad by more and less; 940
And to the people's ears by common fame
'Twas rumoured, how a new young marchioness
He with him brought, with so great costliness,
That never had been seen by human eye
So great array in all West Lombardy. 945

The marquis, who all this contrived and knew,
Ere that the earl was come, a message sent
To fetch this poor Griselda, good and true ;
And she with humble heart and face content,
With no high-swollen or ambitious bent, 950
Came at his hest ; and on her knees she fell,
And greeted him full reverently and well.

“Griseld,” quoth he, “my will is utterly,
This maiden, that shall wedded be to me,
Received shall be to-morrow as royally 955
As possibly she in my house may be ;
And eke, that every wight, in his degree,
Shall have his place in serviceable wise
And pleasure high, as best I can devise.

I have no woman of sufficient skill 960
The chambers to array in order due,
As best I wish ; and therefore, at my will,
Thine be the ordering of my household-crew ;
Thou knowest well of old what I would do ;
Though thine array be poor and ill to see, 965
Yet do thy duty at the least,” quoth he.

“Not only, lord, am I full glad,” quoth she,
“To do your will, but I desire thereto
To serve you and to please in my degree
Without pretence, and so shall ever do. 970
Nor ever—whether weal or woe ensue—
The spirit in my constant heart shall cease
To love you best, above all love’s increase.”

And with that word the house she ’gan set right,
And tables for to set and beds to make 975

Endeavouring still to do whate'er she might,
And prayed the chamber-maids, for kindness' sake,
To hasten them, and quickly sweep and shake ;
And she, the chief in service of them all,
Hath every room arrayed and eke his hall. 980

At middle morn began this earl alight,
That with him brought these noble children two ;
In haste the people ran to see the sight
Of their array, of rich and glorious hue ;
And then amongst themselves they deem it true 985
That Walter was no fool to have in mind
To change his wife ; for all was well designed.

For she is fairer, so they witness all,
Than is Griseld, and full of youthful grace ;
And fairer fruit may well between them fall, 990
And nobler, since she came of noble race ;
Her brother likewise was so fair of face,
That all beheld them with approving eyes,
Commending now the marquis' conduct wise.—

' O stormy people ! unstable and untrue ! 995
Still indiscreet and changing as a vane, |
Delighting ever in rumour that is new,

For like the changing moon ye wax and wane ;
Still full of idle talk, not worth a grain ;
Your constancy is vain, your doom unjust, 1000
A fool is he that in your praise would trust ! '—

So spake the wise within that city's range,
When all the folk were gazing up and down
And showed their gladness at this latest change,
A mistress new to welcome to their town. 1005
No more of this parade I here set down ;
But to Griselda's fate myself address,
To tell her patience and her business.

Full busy was Griseld in everything
That most concerned the coming glad event, 1010
Nowise ashamed of her apparelling,
Though coarse indeed and in some measure rent ;
But with glad cheer towards the gate she went
With other folk the marchioness to greet ;
And after that doth all her tasks complete. 1015

With such glad cheer his guests she well receiveth,
Each guest exactly in his due degree,
That no one there default or lack perceiveth ;
But still they wonder who this well may be

That men in such a poor apparel see, 1020
Yet showing such respect and reverence ;
And worthily they praise her providence.

And all this while was she so wholly bent
This maid and eke her brother to commend
With all her heart and most benign intent, 1025
So well that no one could her praise amend.
But at the last, when all the nobles wend
To sit at meat, lord Walter 'gan to call
Griseld, as she was busied in his hall.

“Griseld,” quoth he, as if 'twere in his play, 1030
“How seems my new wife's beauty now to thee?”
“Right well, my lord,” quoth she ; “for sooth to say,
A fairer wife I never saw than she.
I pray God grant her full prosperity !
And so I hope that He to you will send 1035
Enough contentment, till your life shall end.

One thing I warn you and entreat to shun,
That ye ne'er harass with tormenting ways
This tender maid, as ye have sometimes done ;
For she was fostered in her younger days 1040
More tenderly ; and, as my fear betrays,

She could not well adversity endure
Like one brought up amongst the humblest poor."

And when this Walter saw her patience,
Her mildness, and no discontent at all, 1045
Though he to her so oft had done offence,
And she as firm and constant as a wall,
Preserving still her innocence withal,
This sturdy marquis did his heart address
To rue upon her wifely steadfastness. 1050

"This is enough, Griselda mine," quoth he,
"Be now no more aghast or sore dismayed,
I have thy faith and thy benignity
As great as e'er was woman's, well assayed,
In high estate or miserably arrayed. 1055
Now know I, dearest wife, thy steadfastness ;"—
And took her in his arms, with many a kiss.

And she, for wonder, took thereof no heed,
She heard no single word of all he spake ;
She seemed as starting from a sleep indeed, 1060
Till from her great amazement she did wake.

"Griseld, by Him that died for sinners' sake,
Save thee," quoth he, "none other wife I have,
Nor ever had, as God my soul may save !

This is thy daughter whom thou hast supposed 1065
To be my wife ; that other, faithfully,
Shall be my heir, as I have ay proposed.
Thou only wast his mother, certainly.
I kept them at Bologna secretly ;
Take them again ; for now thou canst not say 1070
Thou of thy children art forlorn this day.

And folk that otherwise have said of me,
I warn them well that I this part did play
For no vile malice nor for cruelty,
But only this thy virtue to assay, 1075
And not my children—God forbid !—to slay,
But to preserve them secretly and still,
Till I thy purpose knew and all thy will.”

When this she heard, in swoon adown she falleth
For very joy ; and when recovereth she, 1080
She both her children young unto her calleth,
And in her arms, still weeping piteously,
Embraceth them and kisseth tenderly
Full like a mother, while with many a tear
She batheth both their faces and their hair. 1085

O what a piteous thing it was to see
Her swooning, and her humble voice to hear !

“Gramercy, lord ! I render thanks,” quoth she,
“That ye have saved for me my children dear !
Now reck I never to be dead right here ! 1090
Since both your love and grace my love commend,
I heed not death, nor when my ghost shall wend !

O children young and dear, my chief delight !
Your woeful mother feared, assuredly,
Some cruel hound or beast of savage might 1095
Had eaten you ! But God, for clemency,
And your benignant father, tenderly,
Have kept you safe ! ” No more could she express,
But sank upon the ground for joy’s excess.

And in her swoon so firmly holdeth she 1100
Her children twain within her close embrace,
That with great sleight and much dexterity
The children from her arms did they displace.
Oh ! many a tear on many a pitying face
Ran down, of them that watchful stood beside ; 1105
And scarce around her could they long abide.

Now Walter soothes her and her grief abateth,
She riseth up, all bashful, from the ground ;
And every wight with loving care awaiteth

Till she her wonted constancy hath found. 1110
And Walter doth in kindness so abound
That it was joyous to behold the cheer
Between the twain, in reconcilment dear.

Her noble ladies, soon as e'er they may,
Have taken her, and tow'rs her chamber gone, 1115
And stripped her clear of all her coarse array,
And in a cloth of gold that brightly shone,
Wearing a crown with many a sparkling stone
Upon her head, they into hall her brought,
And honoured her as fully as they ought. 1120

Thus hath this piteous day a blissful end ;
For every man and woman do their might
This day in mirth and revel for to spend,
Till in the welkin shone the stars so bright ;
For yet more sumptuous in all men's sight 1125
Was this high feast, and richer in array,
Than was the revel on her wedding-day.

Full many a year in high prosperity
Survive these two, with peace and concord blest ;
And blissfully his daughter married he 1130
Unto a lord, one of the worthiest

In Italy ; and then, in peace and rest
His wife's poor father at his court he keepeth,
Until the soul out of his body creepeth.

His son succeeds in his inheritance 1135
In rest and peace, after his father's day ;
And fortunate was he in marriage-chance,
Yet put he not his wife in great assay.
This world is not so strong—let none say nay—
As once it was in days of olden faith ; 1140
And therefore hearken what mine author saith.

This tale is told—not that men's wives ere should
Griselda follow in humility ;
For that must not be suffered, though they would ;
But rather, that each wight in his degree 1145
Should be as constant in adversity
As was Griseld ; and therefore Petrarch writeth
This story, which with high style he enditeth.

For since a woman was so patiént
Unto a mortal man, much more we ought 1150
To take with patience all that God hath sent ;
For 'tis His right, to prove the thing He wrought ;
But yet He tempteth none that He hath bought,

As saith Saint James, if ye his letter read,
Yet proveth men continually, indeed, 1155

And suffereth us, our faith to exercise,
With stinging scourges of adversity
Full oft to be chastised in sundry wise ;
Not to discern our will, for truly He
Ere we were born, knew our inconstancy ; 1160
But all His righteous ways our weal ensure ;
Then let us live in virtue, and endure.

But one word, lordlings, hearken ere I go :—
Full hard it were to find here, nowadays,
In all a town Griseldas three, or two ; 1165
For, be they truly put to such assays,
The gold of them such bad alloy displays
Of brass, that, though the coin be fair to see,
'Twould rather break in twain than bended be.

Therefore, to gratify the Wife of Bath, 1170
Whom God preserve, of all her set the queen,
In sovereignty, for else indeed 'twere scath,
I will with merry heart, full fresh and green,
Sing you a song to gladden you, I ween ;
And here we cease to speak of serious things ;— 1175
Hearken my song that in this manner sings.—

CHAUCER'S ENVOY

Griseld is dead, and eke her patiéncé,
And both alike are buried, cold and pale ;
And hence I cry, in open audience,
No wedded man should boldly thus assail 1180
His spouse's patience, in the hope to find
Griselda's ; for he certainly will fail.

O noble wives, well blessed with providence,
Bid no humility your tongue to nail ;
Let never clerk have cause or diligence 1185
To write of you so marvellous a tale
As of Griselda, patient, mild, and kind,
Lest 'Lean-Cow' swallow you in her entrail !

Like Echo, keep no silent diffidence,
But, always answering back, be prompt to rail ; 1190
Be ne'er deluded by your innocence,
But sharply let your tyranny prevail.
Imprint full well this lesson in your mind,
For profit, such as may your hearts regale.

Ye arch-wives, stand upon your own defence, 1195
Since ye are strong as is a mighty whale ;
Nor suffer men to do the least offence.
And slender wives, that in the fight are frail,
Be eager as a tiger is in Ind,
And clatter like a mill-wheel or a flail. 1200

Ne'er stand in dread, nor show them reverence ;
For though thy husband should be armed in mail,
The arrows of thy bitter eloquence
Shall through his breast or helmet work him bale ;
In jealousy endeavour him to bind, 1205
And thou shalt make him cower as doth a quail.

If thou be fair, be well in evidence ;
Display thy visage, and thy garments trail ;
If ugly, spare not to incur expence,
And get thee friends by bidding men 'all hail ! ' 1210
Be light of mien as linden-leaves in wind,
And let him weep, and wring his hands, and wail !

THE SECOND NUN'S TALE

The Prologue of the Second Nun's Tale.

THE servant and the nurse of every vice,
Which men in English know as Idleness,
Gate-porter of delights that men entice,
To shun, and by her contrary depress,
That is to say, by lawful Business, 5
We ever ought, with good intent and heed,
Lest that the fiend, through Idleness, succeed.

For he that with his thousand nooses sly
Continually us waiteth to enwrap,
When he in Idleness a man may spy, 10
Can oft so lightly catch him in his trap,
That, till a man be held as by a strap,
He knows not that the fiend hath him in hand ;
Well ought we work, and Idleness withstand.

And though a man should never dread to die, 15
Yet still we see by reason, questionless,
That Idleness is rotten lethargy,
Whereof there never comes a rich increase ;
Sloth holds her in a leash without release
Merely to sleep, and eat and drink again, 20
Devouring all that others' toils obtain.

And hence, to put away such idleness,
That cause is of so great confusion,
I here have done my faithful business
To trace the Legend, in translation, 25
That tells thy glorious life and passion,
Thou, with thy garland wrought of rose and lily ;
Thee mean I, maid and martyr, Saint Cecily !

Invocation to Mary.

On thee, that art the flower of virgins all,
Of whom St. Bernard was so fain to write, 30
On thee, at this beginning, first I call ;
Thou comfort of us wretches, bid m'endite
Thy maiden's death, who, by her virtues' might,
Won life eternal, and the fiend subdued,
As from her story men may well conclude. 35

Thou maid and mother, daughter of thy Son,
Thou well of mercy, cure of passions base,
In whom God deigned to dwell, thou chosen one ;
Though humble, o'er the world raised high by grace,
Thou didst ennoble all the human race ; 40
For in our flesh the Maker of mankind
Did not disdain His Son to clothe and wind.

Within the blissful cloister of thy sides
Took human shape th' eternal Love and Peace,
The Lord, the triple universe Who guides, 45
Whom earth and sea and firmament ne'er cease
To praise ; and thou, O virgin blemishless,
A maiden pure, didst in thy body bear
The great Creator of all creatures fair.

Assembled is in thee magnificence, 50
With mercy, goodness, and such clemency
That thou, who art the sun of excellence,
Not only helpst them that pray to thee,
But oftentimes, of thy benignity,
Full freely, ere that men thy help beseech, 55
Thou go'st before, and art their life's true leech.

Now help, thou meek and blissful mother-maid,
Me, wretch abandoned in a place of gall ;

Think how the Canaanitish woman said,
That dogs eat sometimes of the fragments small 60
That from their master's table haply fall ;
✓ And though that I, unworthy son of Eve,
Be sinful, yet accept what I believe.

And since that faith, divorced from works, is dead,
So to do rightly give me wit and space, 65
That I escape the land of darkness dread !
O thou, that art so fair and full of grace,
Mine advocate be in that highest place
Where without end the angels sing hosanna,
Thou Christ's sweet mother, daughter dear of Anna! 70

And by thy rays my soul in prison light,
That troubled is by that contagión
The body brings, and by the weighty might
Of earthly lust and false affection ;
O port of refuge, O salvación 75
Of them that are in sorrow and distress,
Now help, for to my task I me address.

✓ Yet pray I you that read the tale I write,
Forgive me, though I take no diligence
This sacred story subtly to endite ; 80

For here I keep to both the words and sense
Of him that, in the Saint's dear reverence,
The story wrote, her Legend following still,
And pray you mend my writing, ye that will.

*Interpretation of the name Cecilia, as given by friar
Jacobus Januensis, in the Golden Legend.*

First will I you the name of Saint Cecily 85
Expound, as men may in her Legend see ;
In English, it expresses 'heaven's lily,'
For her pure chasteness of virginity ;
Or, since she whiteness had of purity,
Greenness of conscience, and of holy name 90
The savour sweet—hence 'lily' was her name.

Or else Cecilia means 'path of the blind,'
Since she example was by cautioning ;
Or else Cecilia, as I written find,
Is made up, by a kind of fashioning, 95
Of 'heaven' and 'Leah' ; where, in figuring,
The 'heaven' is set for thought of holiness,
And 'Leah' for her lasting business.

Cecilia also may explained be here
‘Devoid of blindness,’ for her glorious light 100
Of sapience, and for her virtues clear ;
Or else, again, this maiden’s name so bright
Of ‘heaven’ and ‘*leos*’ comes, because, by right,
Men well her might the ‘heaven of people’ call,
Example bright of prudent actions all. 105

For *leos* ‘people’ means, we English say ;
And e’en as men may in the heavens see
✓ The sun and moon and stars in every way,
So, by the spirit, in this maiden free
Men saw in faith her magnanimity, 110
And eke the brightness of her sapience,
And of her sundry works the excellence.

And even as philosophers do write
That heav’n is swift and round, and glows with heat,
Right so this fair Cecilia the white 115
Was swift and busy in her actions meet,
And in good perseverance round, complete,
And glowed in works of charity full bright.—
Now have I well declared her name aright.

*Here beginneth the Second Nun's Tale, of the Life of
Saint Cecilia.*

Cecilia, maiden bright, her Legend saith, 120
Was born of Roman race, of noble kind,
And from her cradle fostered in the faith
Of Christ, and bare His gospel in her mind;
She never ceased—for so I written find—
From constant prayer, and God to love and dread, 125
Beseeching Him to keep her maidenhead.

And when this maiden must unto a man
Be wedded, one that was full young of age,
Of noble birth, and named Valerian,
And when the day was come of marriage, 130
She, ever humble, with devotion sage,
Beneath her robe of gold, that sat full fair,
Wore next her tender skin a cloth of hair.

And while the organ played with sweet accord,
To God alone within her heart sang she :— 135
“ My soul and eke my body keep, O Lord,
Unblemished, lest that I confounded be.”
And, for His sake that died upon the tree,
She every third or second day would fast,
And in her orisons long hours she passed. 140

The night came, to her chamber is she gone,
Her husband, as by custom, following near ;
And privily she said to him anon :—
“ O sweet and well-belovèd spouse so dear,
There is a secret, if ye would it hear, 145
Which that right fain would I unto you say,
If first ye swear ye will me not betray.”

✓ Valerian thereupon did truly swear
That, in no case, whate’er the chance might be,
Her secret would he mention anywhere ; 150
And then at last unto her spouse said she :—
“ I have an angel which that loveth me,
And with great love, whene’er I wake or sleep,
Stands ever near, my body for to keep.

And if that he perceiveth in your thought 155
That ye draw near me in unchastity,

He right anon will slay you, doubt it not,
And in your youth ye suddenly will die.
But if ye dwell with me in purity,
Then will he in your welfare take delight, 160
And show you all his joy and glory bright."

Valerian, by the grace of God controll'd,
Thus answered her :—"If I may trust to thee,
Let me that angel see, and him behold ;
And if that this a very angel be, 165
Then will I do as thou exhortest me ;
But if thou love another man, forsooth,
E'en with this very sword I slay you both."

Cecilia straightway answered in this wise :—
"If so you list, the angel shall ye see, 170
If ye believe in Christ, and you baptise.
Go forth upon the Appian Way," quoth she,
"Proceeding from the city miles but three ;
And to the simple folk that nigh there dwell
Repeat the message that I now shall tell. 175

Tell them that I, Cecilia, you have sent
To meet the sainted Urban, good and old,
For secret reasons and with good intent.

And when that ye Saint Urban there behold,
Tell him the secret I to you have told ; 180
And when from sin he shall have purged your heart,
Then shall ye see that angel, ere ye part."

Valerian to th' appointed place is gone,
And, even as her words his steps did guide,
He found this saintly Urban old anon, 185
Who near the burial-place of saints did hide.
And he anon, impatient long to bide,
His message gave; and when he had it told,
For joy Saint Urban did his hands uphold.

The tears he from his streaming eyes let fall :— 190
" Almighty Lord, O Jesu Christ," quoth he,
" Sower of counsel, shepherd of us all,
The fruit of that same seed of chastity
Thou sowedst in Cecilia, take to Thee !
Lo, like a busy bee, and guileless all, 195
Thee serves Cecilia, like a faithful thrall.

For that same husband, who so recently
Seemed like a lion fierce, she sendeth here,
As meek as ever yet was lamb, to Thee ! "
And with that word, anon did there appear 200

An old man, clad in raiment white and clear,
That held a golden-lettered book in hand,
And right before Valerian close did stand.

Valerian like a dead man fell for dread,
At sight of him, who him uplifted straight, 205
And in his book right thus began to read :—
“ One Lord, one faith, one God, without debate ;
One Christendom, of all one Father great,
Above all and amongst all everywhere.”—
These sentences in gold were written there. 210

When this was read, then said this gray-haired man,
“ Believest thou these things? Say yea or nay.”
“ All this believe I,” quoth Valerian,
“ For truer things than these, I dare well say,
No man beneath the skies conceive of may.” 215
The old man vanished then, he knew not where,
And by pope Urban was he christened there.

Valerian goes home, and sees Cecily
Within his chamber near an angel stand ;
This angel held, composed of rose and lily, 220
Two shining crowns, the which he bare in hand ;
And to Cecilia first, I understand,

He gave the first of them, and after, lo !
The other on Valerian did bestow.

“With bodies pure and uncorrupted thought 225
Preserve these never-fading crowns,” quoth he.

“From Paradise to you I these have brought,
And nevermore shall they all withered be,
Or lose their heavenly fragrance, trust ye me ;
And no man shall behold them with his eye, 230
Save he be chaste and hate all villainy.

And thou, Valerian, for that thou so soon
Assentedst to good counsel prudently,
Say what thee list, and thou shalt have thy boon.”
Valerian said :—“A brother dear have I ; 235
Is no man living to my heart so nigh.
I pray you, that my brother may have grace
To know the truth, as I do in this place.”

The angel said :—“God granteth thy request ;
Ye both, with palms of martyrdom arrayed, 240
Shall come hereafter to His blissful feast.”

✓ Therewith Tiburce his brother entrance made,
And smelt what fragrance did the place pervade,
The which these roses and these lilies cast.
Within his heart he gan to wonder fast, 245

And said :—" I wonder, this time of the year,
Whence all this fragrance sweet ariseth so ;
For rose and lily seem to mingle here.
And though I held them in my hands, I trow,
The fragrance might in me no deeper go. 250
The savour sweet that in my heart I find
Hath wholly changed me to another kind."

Valerian said :—" Two garlands here have we,
Snow-white and rosy red, that shine full clear,
But which thine eyes no virtue have to see ; 255
And, as their scent hath reached thee, by my prayer,
So shalt thou yet behold them, brother dear,
If, casting sloth aside, thou wilt in sooth
Believe aright, and know the very truth."

Tiburce replied :—" Now say'st thou this to me 260
In sooth or in a dream? How hear I this?"
" In dreams," replied Valerian, " dwelt have we,
My brother, till this hour ; and all amiss.
But now in truth, at last, our dwelling is."
" How know'st thou this," quoth he, " and in what way?" 265
Valerian answered :—" This I soon shall say.

God's angel hath the living truth me taught,
As thou shalt see, if thou with pure disdain

Renounce thine idols ; else thy hope is naught.”—
(And all the wonder of these garlands twain 270
Saint Ambrose, in his preface, doth explain.
In solemn wise this noble doctor dear
Commendeth it, and saith as ye shall hear :

‘ The palm of martyrdom for to receive,
Cecilia, filled with God’s most holy gift, 275
The world and eke her chamber thought to leave ;
Witness Tiburce’s and Valerian’s shrift,
To whom God, in His bounty, deigned to shift
Two garlands, formed of sweetest flowers that blow,
And made His angel thus the crowns bestow : 280

This maid hath brought these men to bliss above ;
Whereby the world perceived how great the gain,
Devotion to such chastity to love).—
Then did Cecilia show him, clear and plain,
That idols are indeed but things in vain ; 285
For dumb they are and deaf, and naught perceive ;
And charged him all his idols vain to leave.

“ Who knoweth not this thing, a beast he is,”
Replied Tiburce, “ unless I dare to lie.”
And she gan kiss his breast, on hearing this, 290

And glad was she, he could the truth espy.
"This day I take thee here for mine ally,"
Exclaimed this blissful beauteous maiden dear.
And after that she said as ye may hear :—

"Lo ! even as the love of Christ," quoth she, 295
"Made me thy brother's wife, so in that wise
Henceforth for my ally here take I thee,
Since thou thine idols vain canst so despise.
Go with thy brother now, and thee baptise,
And make thee clean ; so may'st thou too behold 300
The angel's face, of which thy brother told."

Tiburce replied, exclaiming—" Brother dear,
First tell me where to go, and to what man ? "
"To whom?" quoth he, "Come forth with right good cheer,
I go to lead thee to the pope Urbán." 305
"To Urban, brother mine, Valerian,"
Exclaimed Tiburce, "thou thinkest me to lead ?
Methinks that were a wondrous thing indeed !

That hunted Urban meanest thou, I trow,
So oft condemned as worthy to be dead, 310
Who dwells in lurking-places to and fro,
And dares not openly put forth his head.

Men would consume him in a fire so red,
If he were found, or men him might espy ;
And we should burn, to bear him company ; 315

And while we to divinity aspire
That in high heaven is hid so secretly,
We in this world should be consumed with fire ! ”
To whom Cecilia answered hardily,
“ Men might indeed dread well and reasonably 320
This earthly life to lose, my own dear brother,
If this alone were life, without another.

A better life is in another place
That never shall be lost—then fear thou not—
Which God’s Son hath revealed to us by grace, 325
The Father’s Son, Who everything hath wrought ;
And all that made were by creative thought
The Ghost, that from the Father did proceed,
Hath filled with everlasting souls indeed.

By miracle and doctrine God’s dear Son, 330
When in this world He dwelt, informed us here
Of other life, that elsewhere may be won.”
To whom replied Tiburce—“ O sister dear,
Didst thou not say but now, with voice sincere,

There is but *one* God, Lord in soothfastness, 335
And now of three Gods dost the names express ? ”

“ That shall I show thee,” said she, “ ere I go.
E’en as a man hath sapiences three,
Remembrance, mind, and intellect, e’en so
Within one Being of divinity 340
Three several persons may there right well be.”
Therewith full busily she gan to preach
Of Christ’s first coming, and His pains to teach,

And many tokens of His suffering ;
How in man’s flesh He did Himself enfold, 345
A full remission to mankind to bring
So closely bound in sins and sorrows cold.
All this in order to Tiburce she told.
And after this Tiburce, with good intent,
To Urban, with Valerian, straightway went, 350

Who gave God thanks ; and with glad heart and light
He christened him, and made him in that place
All perfect in his doctrine, God’s own knight.
And after this Tiburce obtained such grace,
That every day he saw, in time and space, 355
God’s holy angel ; yea, and every boon
He asked of God was granted him full soon.

Full hard it were in order to narrate
How many wonders Jesus for them wrought ;
But at the last, all shortly to relate, 360
The sergeants of the town of Rome them sought,
And them before Almachius, prefect, brought ;
Who questioned them, and learnt their whole intent,
And to the image of great Jove them sent,

And said :—" Who doth his sacrifice withhold, 365
Swap off his head ! This sentence give I here."
Anon these martyrs twain (as here is told),
By Maximus, an officer held dear,
The prefect's registrar, him ever near,
Were seized ; and when he forth the saints did lead, 370
Himself, for pity's sake, did weep indeed.

When Maximus had heard their holy lore,
He from the torturers straightway gat him leave,
And took them to his home, nor tarried more ;
And by their preaching, ere that it was eve, 375
They quickly from the torturers did reave
And Maximus, and from his folk each one,
The heathen faith—to trust in God alone.

Cecilia came, when it was wholly night,
With priests, who christened them with water clear. 380

And afterward, when dawned the morning-light,
Cecilia warned them with full sober cheer,
“ Now, being Christ’s own soldiers lief and dear,
Cast all the works of darkness far away,
And clothe you in His armour bright as day. 385

In truth, a mighty battle have ye fought,
Your course is done, your faith have ye conserved ;
Go to the crown of life that faileth not ;
The righteous Judge, whom ye so well have served,
Shall give it you, as ye have it deserved.” 390
And when this thing was said, as told to you,
Men led them forth, the sacrifice to do.

But when they to the place at last were brought,
The ending of these brethren to relate,
They sacrifice and incense set at naught ; 395
But on their knees they fell, to meet their fate,
With humble hearts and with devotion great,
And lost their heads together in the place ;
Their souls ascended to the King of grace.

And Maximus, who saw this thing betide, 400
With tears of pity told the wondrous sight,
How he beheld their souls to heaven up-glide

'Mid angels full of clearness and of light ;
And by his words converted many a wight.
For which Almachius made him beaten be 405
With whip of lead, till life from him did flee.

Cecilia came, and buried him anon
By Tiburce and Valerian, stealthily,
Within her burying-place, beneath a stone.
And after did Almachius hastily 410
Command his servants bring him openly
Cecilia, that she might before his eyes
To Jove burn incense and do sacrifice.

But they, converted by her holy lore,
Full sorely wept, and had full confidence 415
In all she said, still crying more and more,
“ Christ, Son of God, without a difference,
Is Very God, in our experience,
Who hath so good a servant ever nigh ;
This with one voice proclaim we, though we die.” 420

Almachius, on hearing this befall,
Bade fetch Cecilia, that he might her see ;
And this was his enquiry first of all,
“ What kind of woman art thou ? ” questioned he.

"I am a gentlewoman born," quoth she. 425

"I ask," quoth he, "although it may thee grieve,
Of thy religion—what dost thou believe?"

"Ye have begun your question foolishly,"

Quoth she, "two answers would ye thus include

In one demand; ye ask unlearnedly." 430

Almachius answered her similitude,

"From whence hath come thine answering so rude?"

"From whence?" quoth she, when thus she was arraigned,

"Of upright conscience and of faith unfeigned."

Almachius answered:—"Takest thou no heed 435

How great my power?" Whereto she answered this:—

"Your might," quoth she, "full little is to dread;

} For every mortal's proud dominion is

} But like a bladder, full of wind, y-wis;

For with a needle's point, howe'er men blow, 440

Can all the boast of it be laid full low."

"Full wrongfully begannest thou," quoth he;

"And still in wrong dost make continuance;

How? know'st thou not our mighty princes free

Have thus commanded and made ordinance 445

That every Christian wight shall find mischance

Unless he doth his Christendom belie ;
And have free pardon, if he it deny ? ”

“ Thus err your princes, as your senate doth ; ”
Cecilia said—“ and with perverted sense 450
Ye make us guilty, speaking not the sooth ;
For ye, who recognise our innocence,
Because, in truth, we offer reverence
To Christ, and since we bear the Christian name,
Ye put on us a crime, and eke a blame. 455

But we, that know that Name to be so true
And virtuous, can never it betray ; ”
Almachius answered :—“ Choose now one of two,
Do sacrifice, or Christendom withsay,
That now thou may’st escape from death that way.” 460
Whereat the holy blissful beauteous maid
Began to laugh, and to the prefect said :—

“ O judge, confused in thy simplicity,
Wouldst thou I should deny my innocence
And so become a wicked one ? ” quoth she : 465
“ Lo ! he dissembles here in audience,
He stares, and dotes in such an inference ! ”
To whom Almachius said :—“ Unhappy wretch,
Perceivest not how far my might can stretch ?

Have not to me our princes deigned to give 470
Yea! both the power and the authority
To cause indicted men to die or live?
Why speakest thou so proudly then to me?"
"I speak no more than steadfastly," quoth she,
"Not proudly; for, as speaking for my side, 475
I say, we hate that deadly vice of pride.

And if thou darest not a truth to hear,
Then will I show all openly, by right,
How great a falsehood thou hast uttered here;
Thou say'st, thy princes have assigned thee might 480
Both for to slay and make alive a wight;
Thou, who canst only men of life bereave;
Thou know'st thou hast no other power or leave!

But thou canst say, thy princes have thee makèd
Death's minister; for, if thou further trow, 485
Thou liest; for otherwise thy power is naked."
Almachius said:—"Thy boldness now forgo,
And to our gods give incense, ere thou go.
What wrong to *me* ye do I little care,
But all like a philosopher can bear; 490

But those sore censures can I ill sustain
Thou utterest against our gods," quoth he.

Cecilia answered :—" Foolish judge and vain,
Thou naught hast uttered since thou spak'st to me
Wherein I might not all thy folly see ; 495
And that in every wise thou dost remain
A perfect ignorant, a justice vain !

There lacketh nothing to thine outer eyes
To prove thee blind ; for what perceive we all
To be but stone, as every one espies, 500
That very stone, a god thou wilt it call !
I pray thee, let thy hand upon it fall,
And feel it well ; and stone thou shalt it find,
Since thou canst see not with thine eyes so blind !

It is but shameful that the people dare 505
Thus scorn and laugh at thy simplicity ;
For commonly, men know well everywhere
That mighty God is in the heaven on high ;
And all these images, thou may'st espy,
Can thee or e'en themselves but little speed. 510
They are not worth a mite, in very deed ! "

These words and others like to these said she ;
But he grew wroth, and bade they should her lead
Home to her house ; "and in her house," quoth he,

“ With red flames burn her in her bath with speed ! ” 515
And, as he bade, right so was done indeed ;
For in a bath they fast enclosed the maid,
And night and day much fire beneath it laid.

Throughout the night and following day again,
For all the fire and all the bath’s great heat, 520
She sat all cold, and felt no harm or pain ;
It caused her not a single drop to sweat.
But in that bath her days she must complete.
For he, the prefect, with malign intent,
To slay her in the bath a headsman sent. 525

Three strokes upon her neck he smote full true,
This headsman ; yet could he, by ne’er a chance,
Prevail to smite her slender neck in two.
And, since there was, that time, an ordinance
That no man should his heading-sword advance 530
To strike a fourth stroke, whether soft or sore,
This executioner durst do no more.

But half-dead, with her neck sore smitten there,
He left her lying so, and went his way.
The Christian folk, which that about her were, 535
With sheets the martyr’s blood did thence convey.

Three days she in this torture lingering lay,
And never ceased the holy faith to teach ;
To those she fostered, she survived to preach.

To them she gave her wealth and everything, 540
Committing them to good Saint Urban's care,
And said :—" For this I prayed the heavenly King,
My life for three days' respite yet to spare,
To recommend to you, ere hence I fare,
These souls ; and pray you here to undertake 545
Of this my house a lasting church to make."—

Saint Urban with his deacons secretly
The body fetched, and buried it by night
Amongst his other saints full honourably.
Her house became 'Cecilia's church' aright ; 550
Saint Urban hallowed it, as best he might.
Where Christians, to this day, with service true,
To Christ and to His Saints give honour due.

Here is ended the Second Nun's Tale.

**THE TALE OF THE CANON'S
YEOMAN**

THERE is a canon of religious sect
 Amongst us, who would soon a town infect,
 Though it as great were as was Nineveh,
 Rome, Alexandria, Troy, or some such three. 975
 His sleights and endless ways of subtleness
 Could no man tell in full, or write, I guess,
 E'en though he were to live a thousandth year ;
 None in deceit could ever prove his peer.
 For in his terms of speech he so could wind, 980
 And make proposals in so sly a kind,
 When need was to converse with any wight,
 That he anon would make him dote outright,
 Unless he were a fiend, as he too is.
 Full many a man hath he beguiled ere this, 985
 And will again, if he may live awhile.
 And yet men ride and walk full many a mile

To seek him out, and his acquaintance gain,
Not knowing well how falsely he can feign.
And if you list to give me audience, 990
Ye soon shall hear thereof some evidence.

Ye canons worthy, reverend, and meek,
Suppose not that against your house I speak
Although my tale shall of a canon be.
In every order some we wicked see; 995
And God forbid that all your company
For one man's folly should be grieved by me.
To slander you is nowise my intent,
But only to reprove deceit I meant.
This story is not only told for you, 1000
But eke for others; well ye know, 'tis true
That, though th' apostles numbered twelve alway,
No one but Judas did our Lord betray.
Then why should all the residue have blame
That guiltless were? Of you, I say the same. 1005
Save only this, if ye will list to me,
If any Judas in your convent be,
Remove him thence betimes (my counsel hear)
If ye of future shame or loss have fear.
And be on no account displeased, I pray; 1010
But in this matter hearken what I say.

In London long a priest was sojourning,
Who annual masses for the dead would sing ;
Who to the goodwife was so serviceable
With whom he lodged, and pleasant at her table, 1015
That she would ne'er permit him aught to pay
For board or clothing, went he ne'er so gay ;
And gold to spend had he, for any need.
Of this no more ; but let me straight proceed,
And of the canon tell my tale at least, 1020
Who to confusion brought this hapless priest.

This wily canon came upon a day
Within the priest's own chamber, where he lay ;
A certain sum of money, so he said,
He came to borrow, which should be repaid. 1025
“ Lend me a mark,” said he, “ for days but three,
And to the hour will I return it thee.
And if so be I fail thee to repay,
Then hang me by the neck another day ! ”

The priest produced a mark, with promptness meet, 1030
And oft the canon did his thanks repeat,
And took his leave, and forthwith went his way,
And on the third day, ready to repay,

He came, and gave the priest his mark again ;
Whereof the priest was wondrous glad and fain. 1035

“It ne’er a whit,” quoth he, “can trouble me
To lend a man a mark, or two, or three,
Or what so were in my possession,
When he so true is of condition,
That in no wise he fails to keep his day ; 1040
To such a man I never can say nay.”

“What !” quoth the canon, “should I prove untrue ?
Nay, that full surely would be something new !
Truth is a thing that I shall ever keep
Until that day, whereon I have to creep 1045
Within my grave ; untruth may God forbid !
Believe this surely, as ye would your creed !
God thank I, be it said at fitting tide,
That never yet was man dissatisfied
That gold or silver for my use he lent ; 1050
For falsehood in my heart I never meant.
And sir,” quoth he, “to speak in secrecy,
Since ye so friendly have appeared to me,
And shown to me such kindness of heart,
Your courteous deed to recompense in part, 1055
Now will I show you, if you please to hear,

And make to you the hidden secret clear
How great is in philosophy my skill !
Now take good heed, and watch me, if ye will,
Perform a marvellous deed, before I go." 1060

"Yea?" quoth the priest, "and will ye, sir, do so?
I pray you, by St. Mary! let me see!"

"At your commandment be it, certainly,"
Replied the canon; "God forbid me feign!"

Lo! how this thief could proffer service vain! 1065
For truly, proffered service, seeming fair,
Yet stinketh, as the wise of old declare.
And this full quickly will I verify
In this false canon, root of treachery,
That ever takes delight and happiness— 1070
Such fiendish purposes his heart impress—
In seeking good men to despair to bring;
God keep us from his false dissimuling!

The priest but little knew with whom he dealt,
No warning of approaching harm he felt. 1075
O foolish priest, so innocent of mind,
How soon shall avarice thine eyesight blind!

O graceless man ! how blind is thy conceit !
 How unaware art thou of that deceit
 This subtle fox doth meditate to thee ! 1080
 His wily snares thou know'st not how to flee.
 Wherefore, to come to the conclusion
 Referring to thy great confusion,
 Unhappy man ! I must not now omit
 To tell thy folly and thy want of wit, 1085
 And eke the falsehood of that other wretch,
 As far as can my skill in speech outstretch.

This canon was my master, would ye ween ?
 Good host, in faith, and by the heav'n's great queen,
 It was another canon, and not he, 1090
 Who knew a hundredfold more subtlety !
 He hath betrayed good folks full many a time ;
 Of such deceit it irketh me to rhyme.
 For ever, of his falsehood when I speak,
 For shame of him comes redness to my cheek, 1095
 Or, let me say, my cheeks begin to glow ;
 For redness have I none, right well I know,
 In all my face ; so oft have fumes diverse
 Of metals, as ye heard me first rehearse,
 Consumed and wasted all my ruddiness. 1100
 Now mark this wily canon's cursedness !

“Sir,” quoth he to the priest, “now send your man
For quicksilver ; we need it for our plan ;
And let him bring us ounces two or three.
And when he cometh back, ye soon shall see 1105
A wondrous thing ye ne’er before have seen.”

“Sir,” quoth the priest, “it shall be done, I ween.”
He bade his servant go at his request ;
And he was ready to perform his hest,
And forth he went, and did his errand well, 1110
And brought the quicksilver, the truth to tell,
And to the canon gave these ounces three,
Who laid the metal down full carefully,
And straightway bade the servant coals to bring,
That soon he might perform this wondrous thing. 1115

The coals were fetched, and set in order due ;
A crucible the canon next outdrew
From out his bosom, which he showed the priest.
“This instrument,” quoth he, “that here thou seest,
Take in thine hand, and put thyself therein 1120
Of quicksilver an ounce, and here begin,
In Christ’s name, a philosopher to be.
Full few are they whom I would wish to see
As much as thou, of this my sapience.

For ye shall see here, by experience, 1125
 How I this quicksilver will mortify
 E'en in your very sight, without a lie,
 And make it silver, e'en as good and fine
 As may be any in your purse or mine,
 Or e'en elsewhere, and make it malleable ; 1130
 Or else consider me as false, unable
 Amongst good folks for ever to appear !
 I have a powder here, that cost me dear,
 Shall make all good, for it is cause of all
 Such skilful working as shall here befall. 1135
 Send out your man, and let him stand without,
 And shut the door, while thus we go about
 Our secret toil, that no man may espy
 Whilst we are working in philosophy."
 All as he bade fulfilled was, out of doubt ; 1140
 This same good servant straightway gat him out,
 And thereupon his master shut the door,
 And to their labour haste they, as before.

The priest, still to the canon hearkening,
 Upon the fire set carefully the thing, 1145
 And blew the fire, and busied him full fast.
 Then in the crucible the canon cast
 A powder—nay, I know not what it was,

Some pounded substance, either chalk or glass,
Or somewhat else that was not worth a fly— 1150
Wherewith to blind the priest; and bade him hie
To place the coals together, well above
The crucible. “In token of my love,”
Exclaimed the canon, “shall thine own hands two
Perform the mighty feat we have to do.” 1155

“I thank thee,” quoth the priest, and felt full glad,
And placed the coals, e’en as the canon bade;
And whilst he busy was, that fiendly wretch,
That canon false—the foul fiend hence him fetch!—
Out of his bosom took a beechen coal, 1160
Wherein full craftily was made a hole
In which of silver filings had been put
An ounce, and after had the hole been shut
And stopped with wax, to keep the filings there.
And understand that this contrivance rare 1165
Was not made then, but had been made before.
And other false things shall I tell of more
Hereafterward, that with him he had brought;
For ere he came, to cosen him he thought.
So did he, ere their short acquaintance ceased. 1170
Till he had stripped him, could he ne’er desist.
It irketh me whene’er of him I speak;

Upon his falsehood would I vengeance wreak
If I knew how ; but here he is and there,
So variable, he bides not anywhere. 1175

But now take heed, sirs, for the saints' dear love !
He took the coal whereof I spoke above,
And in his hand bestowed it secretly ;
And whilst the priest arranged so busily
The coals above, as I have told ere this, 1180
The canon said :—" Good friend, ye do amiss ;
This is not ordered as it ought to be ;
But soon will I amend it all," quoth he.
" Now let me meddle with it just a while,
For I have pity on you, by St. Gile ! 1185
Ye seem right hot, I see well how ye sweat !
Here, take a cloth, and wipe away the wet."
And while the priest was wiping thus his face,
The canon took his coal, to his disgrace,
And laid it just above, to middleward 1190
The crucible, and blew well afterward,
Until the coals began to burn full fast.

" Now," quoth the canon, " give us drink, at last,
And soon shall all be well, I undertake ;
Now sit we down, good merriment to make." 1195

And when in time the canon's beechen coal
 Was burnt, the silver filings, through the hole,
 Into the crucible did downward go,
 As reason was ; it needs must happen so,
 Because so even o'er it placed it was. 1200
 But thereof little knew the priest, alas !
 He deemed the coals had all alike been good,
 For nothing of that sleight he understood :
 And when this alchemist his time did see,
 " Rise up, sir priest, and stand close by," quoth he. 1205
 " And since, I wot, ye ingot-mould have none,
 Now go we forth, and fetch a chalky stone.
 Then will I make a mould of that same shape
 An ingot should be, if I have good hap.
 And bring with you a bowl or pan beside, 1210
 With water filled, and soon shall it be tried
 How well we shall the business all achieve.
 And yet, that thou mayst never disbelieve
 Nor in your absence wrongly think of me,
 I will not absent from your presence be, 1215
 But go with you, and come with you again."
 The chamber-door, to make the matter plain,
 They opened then and shut, and went their way,
 And therewithal the key forth carried they,
 And came again, nor did they long delay. 1220

Why should I tarry all the livelong day?
He took the chalk, and shaped it as he might
To form an ingot; hear how great his sleight!

I say, he slyly took from out his sleeve
A piece of silver—woe may he receive! 1225
Which was but just a measured ounce by weight.
Take heed how I his cunning ways relate!
He shaped the mould, in length and breadth about,
To suit this secret piece, without a doubt,
So slyly, that the priest it ne'er espied; 1230
And in his sleeve once more did he it hide.
Then from the crucible the silver drew,
Which in the mould right merrily he threw
And after in the water-vessel cast
When came the time, and bade the priest full fast:—1235
“See what is there! Put in thine hand and grope;
There shalt thou find good silver, as I hope!
What, by mine honour, should there else be seen?
A plate of silver silver is, I ween!”
He put his hand in, and a piece uptook 1240
Of silver fine; and glad in heart and look
The priest was, when he saw that it was so.
“God’s blessing and His Mother’s with thee go,
And blessings of all saints be thine,” he said,

“ And be their maledictions on my head 1245
Except ye will vouchsafe to show to me
This noble science and its subtlety !
I will be yours in all that e’er I may ! ”

“ Yet,” quoth the canon, “ will I make assay
The second time, that ye may take good heed, 1250
And be expert in this, and in your need
May, in my absence, prove some other time
This precious lesson and this lore sublime.
Take we another ounce,” he blithely said,
“ Of quicksilver, without a doubt or dread, 1255
And do therewith as ye have done ere this
With that which now to silver altered is.”

This priest then busieth him in all he can
To do whate’er the canon—cursed man—
Commanded him, and fast he blew the fire, 1260
To come to the result of his desire.
And lo ! this canon, in the passing while,
All ready stood, his victim to beguile,
And, for pretence, within his hand he bare
A hollow stick—take heed now and beware— 1265
I’ th’ end whereof an ounce, and no whit more,
Of silver filings placed was (as before

Was in the coal), and closed with waxen lid
 To keep the filings in their place, well hid.
 And whilst the priest was busy there and here, 1270
 This canon with his stick anon drew near
 Beside him, and his powder cast he in
 As erst he did—the devil out of his skin
 Him flay, I pray to heav'n, to quite his greed ;
 For ever was he false in thought and deed ! 1275
 And with the stick, the crucible beside,
 Wherein this false contrivance was supplied,
 He stirred the coals, till all to melt began
 The wax against the fire, as every man,
 Save he a fool be, knows it needs must do ; 1280
 And all that in the stick was downward drew,
 And in the crucible it quickly fell.

Now, sirs ! why should ye better wish than well ?
 When that the priest was thus beguiled again,
 Supposing all was true, to speak it plain, 1285
 So glad was he, I cannot half express
 How great his mirth was and his joyfulness.
 And to the canon proffered, for the boon,
 Body and goods. “Yea,” quoth the canon soon,
 “Though poor I be, thou skilful shalt me find ; 1290
 I warn thee well, that more remains behind.

Have ye some copper in the house? ” quoth he ;
“ Yea,” quoth the priest, “ I trow, some here may be.”
“ Or else go buy some, quickly as ye may ;
Now, good sir, go in haste upon your way.” 1295

He went his way, and soon the copper brought.
The canon in his hands the copper caught,
And of that copper weighed out just an ounce.
Too simple is my language to pronounce,
As servant of my wit, the doubleness 1300
Of this false canon, root of cursedness !
He friendly seemed to all that knew him not,
But fiendly was he both in heart and thought.
It wearieth me to show his fickleness ;
And, ne’ertheless, I fain would all express 1305
In hopes that others may be warned thereby ;
And for no other reason, certainly.

Then in the crucible this ounce he placed,
And on the fire he set it, all in haste,
Cast powder in, and made the priest to blow 1310
And in his labour stoop adown full low
As erst he did ; and all was trickery still ;
He made the priest his dupe, as pleased his will ;
And after, in the ingot-mould it cast,

And in the pan conveyed it, at the last, 1315
Of water, putting next therein his hand.
And in his sleeve, as well ye understand
Ye heard me say, a silver plate had he,
Which thence this cursed wretch drew stealthily—
The priest perceiving not his artful plan— 1320
And left it in the bottom of the pan;
And in the water fumbled to and fro,
And wondrous secretly uplifted, lo!
The copper piece, unnoticed by the priest,
And hid it; then he caught him by the breast, 1325
And spake to him, thus saying, as in game:—
“Stoop quickly down; by heav’n! ye are to blame;
Now help me, friend, as I did you before;
Put in your hand, and see what gift’s in store!”

The priest took up this silver plate anon; 1330
Then said the canon:—“Let us hence be gone
With these three pieces that we thus have wrought,
To ask some goldsmith if their worth be aught.
For, by my faith, I would not, for my hood,
Suspect them aught but silver, fine and good; 1335
And quickly shall their value tested be.”

Then to the goldsmith with these pieces three

They went, and put them to severe assay
By fire and hammer ; no man might say nay
But that they all were what they ought to be. 1340

This foolish priest, who gladder now than he ?
Was never bird so blithe to hail the day,
Or nightingale, when comes the month of May,
That was so fain full lustily to sing ;
No lady blither in her carolling, 1345
Or readier to discourse of love's alarms ;
No knight more eager for some deed of arms
To stand in favour of his lady dear,
Than was this priest this precious lore to hear ;
And to the canon spake, and thus replied ; 1350
“ For love of God, that once for sinners died,
And as ye think I may your grace deserve,
What costeth this receipt ? Say, what will serve ? ”

“ Now by our Lady, dear it is,” quoth he,
“ I warn you well ; for, save a friar and me, 1355
No one in England can such changes make.”

“ No matter, sir,” quoth he ; “ for God's dear sake,
What shall I pay you ? Tell me all, I pray.”

"In truth," quoth he, "full dear it is, I say!
 Sir, at a word, wilt thou this secret have? 1360
 The price is forty pounds, so God me save!
 But for the kindness that ye showed before
 In helping me, ye should, forsooth, pay more."
 The priest the sum of forty pounds anon
 In nobles brought, and gave them every one 1365
 To pay this canon, for this dear receipt,
 Whose aim was solely to deceive and cheat.

"Sir priest," he said, "I ne'er for praise would bid,
 But rather seek to keep my skill close hid;
 And, as ye love me, keep it secret still. 1370
 For if men knew my subtlety and skill,
 I ween, such envy would they show to me
 Because I know so much philosophy,
 I soon should die; there were no other way."

"Now God forbid!" quoth he, "what's this ye say? 1375
 For rather would I all my wealth expend—
 And otherwise may madness be my end!—
 Than any such mischance should you befall!"

"For your good will, sir, may ye speed in all,"
 The canon said, "I thank thee, sir! farewell!" 1380

He went his way, and ne'er, as it befell,
Again was seen ; and when the priest would test,
At such time as appeared to him the best,
This dear receipt, farewell ! it would not be !
Lo ! thus deluded and beguiled was he ! 1385

NOTES

I. THE PRIORESS'S TALE.

Line 1643. This Tale begins at l. 1643 of Group B, or the second group of the Tales as arranged in the Six-text Edition published by the Chaucer Society. The first stanza is a free adaptation of the two first verses of the 8th Psalm, headed *Domine, dominus noster* in our prayer-books.

1651. *Lily-flower*. The lily is the symbol of the Virgin Mary.

1658. Chaucer had previously written a poem called ABC, or a Hymn to the Virgin, containing a similar comparison of the Virgin to the burning bush. Just as the burning bush was not consumed, so did the virginity of Mary remain without blemish.

1667. Partly imitated from Dante, *Paradiso*, xxxiii. 16:—

“La tua benignità non pur soccorre
A chi dimanda, ma molte fiate
Liberamente al dimandar precorre”; etc.

1679. *Jewish colony*. Chaucer has *Jewerye*, i.e. Jewry. In many towns there was formerly a Jewry, or Jews' quarter. Usury was formerly forbidden; and the only usurers were Jews, Lombards, or other foreigners.

1695. *Image*; i.e. an image of the Virgin by the way-side, as often seen abroad.

1698. A brief Latin prayer, beginning—'Aue Maria, gratia plena'; from Luke i. 28.

1702. An old proverb:—"A good child is soon taught."

1705. St. Nicholas, whilst still an infant, is said to have abstained from sucking on Wednesdays and Fridays.

1708. There are two hymns beginning with *Alma redemptoris mater*. The reference in l. 1724 below suggests that the one meant begins thus:—

"Alma redemptoris mater, quae peruia caeli
Porta manes, et stella maris, succurre cadenti."

See further, as to this, in the Preface.

1749. The popular feeling against the Jews was then extremely bitter, even in England.

1774. The reference is to Rev. xiv. 4.

1801. *Lay upright*, lay on his back; an old phrase.

1817. *Rachel*; referring to Matt. ii. 18.

1874. The story of Hugh of Lincoln, a boy supposed to have been murdered by the Jews, is recorded by Matthew of Paris, under the date 1255.

II. THE PARDONER'S TALE.

463. The Tale begins at l. 463 of Group C, according to the arrangement in the Six-text Edition.

474. The body of Christ seemed to be torn to pieces by swearers, as they swore at one time by one limb, and at another time by another. Chaucer's Parson's Tale has the same allusion :—"Swear not so sinfully, in dismembering of Christ, by soul, heart, bones, and body."

489. *Herod*. See Matt. xiv.; Mark vi.

492. *Seneca*; in his Letters, viz. in Letter 83.

498. The allusion is to the Fall of Adam.

661. Before this line, I have omitted a long digression of 156 lines, in which the Pardoner moralises, after his manner, on the sins of gluttony, drunkenness, gambling, and swearing; concluding by saying:—"But, sirs, now will I straight renew my Tale." He then begins again, quite abruptly, with the words:—"These rioters, these three of whom I tell," quite forgetting that, as may be seen, he has not said a word hitherto about "*three rioters*," but has only previously mentioned, in l. 463, "a company of youthful folk." This is perhaps not an oversight, but rather represents the free and easy tone of the Pardoner's usual discourses. Either way, it is remarkable.

662. *Prime*. The time varied at different dates. It seems here to mean 9 a.m., at which hour there were prayers, announced by a bell.

664. *Handbell*. A handbell was carried by the sexton before a corpse at a funeral.

673. *Murdered.* That is, he died suddenly, slain by "a silent thief," named Death, who had slain many thousands recently, during a pestilence.

697. Let each of us, by holding up our hands in token of truth, swear friendship to each other. Men who had thus taken an oath became, in the old phrase, "sworn brothers."

729. Lines 727-733 are imitated from the first Elegy of a Latin poet called Maximianus. He represents an old man as knocking with his stick upon the earth, entreating his mother (*i.e.* the earth) to let him in, and receive him into her bosom.

734. Nearly every householder, especially among the poorer classes, used to have a large chest at the foot of his bed, in which he kept (for safety) such personal things as he valued, especially clothes. The old man was ready to give up all his worldly treasures for a hair-cloth to be used as his shroud.

739. Ready as the old man is to die a natural death, he deprecates violence at the hands of the three rioters.

743. "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man"; Levit. xix. 32.

770. The value of an *English* florin was 6s. 8d.

781. Alluding to the proverb—"Lightly come, lightly go."

794. *The lot.* Chaucer calls it "the *cut*." One of them was to hold three straws or bits of stick in his hand; and whoever drew the shortest (or the longest) drew the *cut*. See l. 802.

889. Avicenna, or Ibn-Sina, an Arabian physician of Bokhara, A.D. 980-1037. His great work, called The Book of the Canon in Medicine, was familiarly called the Canon (l. 890). It was divided into books and chapters; and each chapter was called "a Fen," from the Arabic *fann*, meaning "a part" of any science. The chapter on poisons is Fen 1 of Book IV.

894. The Pardoner's Tale contains 74 more lines; but they have nothing to do with the story. They are chiefly concerned with eulogies of his pardons, the value of which is disputed by the Host. A quarrel between these worthies ensues, followed by a reconciliation.

III. THE CLERK'S TALE.

6. "To every thing there is a season"; Eccles. iii. 1.

27. Petrarch resided at Arquà, two miles from Padua, in the N.E. of Italy.

34. Linian; *i. e.* the canonist Giovanni di Lignano, professor of canon-law at Bologna; he died in 1383.

43. Petrarch's story is preceded by a Proem or Introduction, which briefly described Piedmont; especially Saluzzo, which is to the S. of Turin.

47. Monte Viso. See the description of the route from Mont Dauphin to Saluzzo, by the Col de Viso, in Murray's Guide to Switzerland and Piedmont.

49. The river Po passed Placentia (Piacenza), which stood on the old Æmilian way (here called Emilia), and

afterwards Ferrara; flowing into Venetian territory (here called Venice).

82. *To let slide*, i. e. to neglect, is a phrase still current in America, but in England is often regarded as undignified. It occurs not only here, but in Shakespeare; *Tam. Shrew*, Introduction, l. 5.

101. Observe the use of *ye* as a term of respect. Such was then the custom. So in l. 321; but observe *thou* in l. 324, as used to an inferior.

421. *Royally*; because Griselda's virtues were royal, though her birth was lowly.

483. Observe the use here of the word *thee*; it is a covert slight, offered under the pretence of reporting the opinion of others. The use of *thy* occurs in ll. 484 and 489. Cf. l. 494.

736. It was not uncommon, at that date, for girls to be married at the age of twelve. The Wife of Bath was married at that age.

799. That is, a ploughman could do as he liked in this matter; but a prince has duties to his subjects.

850. Her only dowry was her peasant's clothing; and even this had been taken from her when the marquis took her to his palace. Lines 851-861 are all Chaucer's own.

913. The original Latin expressly notes that Janicula had carefully preserved the clothes which Griselda had left behind her.

965. *Thine*. Griselda is now a mere menial, to be addressed as *thou*. So in l. 1031.

995-1008. These two characteristic stanzas are of Chaucer's addition.

1053. The use of *thy* here is very different to that in l. 965. The words *thou* and *thy*, mostly used to an inferior, could also be used between equals, as a mark of endearment.

1079-1106. Prof. Morley notes that "there is nothing in Boccaccio, and but half a sentence in Petrarch, answering to these four beautiful stanzas."

1138-1141. These lines are wholly Chaucer's own; by "mine author" he means Petrarch.

1163. The rest of the poem is original, and was obviously added when the tale was revised. The word *lordlings* is addressed by the Clerk to the other pilgrims.

1177-1212. This famous Envoy, in Chaucer's most playful vein, exhibits great metrical skill, being constructed with only three rhyme-endings for the 36 lines; viz. *-ence*, *-ale* (*-ail*), and *-ind*. The last of these appears only in the *fifth* line of each stanza.

1188. *Lean-Cow*, in French called *Chiche-vache*, was one of two fabulous animals. She was always lean, because her sole food was patient wives; but her companion *Bi-corne* (the two-horned) was always fat enough, because she adopted the more prudent course of eating nothing but patient husbands.

1196. *A mighty whale*; substituted for the original "greet camaille," i.e. great camel, which cannot be made to rhyme in its modern form.

IV. THE SECOND NUN'S TALE.

1. This Tale begins Group G in the Six-text Edition.

3. This line was inserted with reference to the famous French poem called *The Romaunt of the Rose*, in which the gate of the Garden of Pleasure is kept by a maiden called Idleness.

19. *Her*, i. e. Idleness, which was considered as one of the "branches" of Sloth.

30. St. Bernard composed one of his most celebrated works, entitled *Missus est*, in honour of the Virgin Mary.

36-51. A free translation from Dante's *Paradiso*, Canto xxxiii. ll 1-21: "*Vergine madre, figlia del tuo Figlio*," etc.

52. We may remember here that *sun*, in Old English, was of the feminine gender.

56. *Leech*, i. e. physician; as in *Timon of Athens*, v. 4. 84.

58. *Place of gall*; the orig. has "*desert of galle*," i. e. desert of gall, or bitter desert. There is a reference here to the Heb. *mārāh*, bitterness, and to the name Mary.

59. See Matt. xv. 22.

62. *Son of Eve*, i. e. the translator, Chaucer. The author, when revising this tale, and putting it into the mouth of the Second Nun, forgot to alter *son* to *daughter*.

70. The Virgin Mary was said to be the daughter of Joachim and Anna.

85. The five stanzas in ll. 85-119 really belong to the Legend itself, as told in the original Latin; and are thence translated.

87. Several of the Legends of the Saints begin with ridiculous etymologies. We are here offered *five*, all being wrong. Caecilia is, properly, the fem. of Caecilius, the name of a Roman family who claimed descent from Caeculus, an ancient Italian hero. Caeculus, probably a nickname, is a diminutive of *caecus*, blind; and meant "somewhat blind." The five etymologies are only right in so far as they refer to *caecus*. They are as follows.

(a) *Caeli lilia*, error for *Caeli lilium*, the lily of heaven; l. 87.

(b) *Caecis via*, path for the blind; l. 92.

(c) *Caelum* and *Lia*; where *caelum* means "heaven," and *Lia* is the Latin spelling of Leah in the Book of Genesis. And Leah was considered as the type of the 'active life,' as Rachael was of the 'contemplative life'; ll. 94-8.

(d) *Caecitate carens*, devoid of blindness; because she was bright and glorious; l. 100.

(e) *Caelum* and *leos*; where *caelum* means "heaven," and *leos* is the Attic Greek λέως, i.e. "people"; l. 103.

114. This refers to the science of old time. The heaven or firmament appears to be round; it appears to revolve around the earth with a very rapid motion, though it is really the earth that spins; and it was supposed to consist of concentric spheres, of which the most remote was the empyrean, or "burning sphere," the abode of angels.

177. *Saint Urban*, i.e. Urban I., pope, who succeeded Calixtus, A.D. 222; beheaded May 25, 230.

186. An interesting allusion to the catacombs of Rome.

201. The "old man" is an apparition of St. Paul. He holds a copy of his Epistles, and reads Ephes. iv. 5, 6.

270-283. A long and awkward parenthesis, not found in all the versions of the Legend, and clearly an interpolation. It occurs, however, in the Latin version which Chaucer had before him, so that he had no choice. But the story reads better without it.

271. I can find no such passage in the genuine works of St. Ambrose; see the note above.

273. *It*, i.e. "the wonder," in l. 270.

288. *A beast*, i.e. void of understanding, like a beast of the field. Latin—"pecus est."

338. *Sapientes*. This must be left, as Chaucer so has it. But he has mistaken the Latin, which has: "In una hominis sapientia tria sunt, ingenium, memoria, et intellectus"; i.e. in the *one* sapience of a man there are three things, natural capacity, memory, and intellect.

361. *Them*, i.e. the brothers; but not Cecilia.

366. *Swap off*, strike off. I purposely retain *swap*.

383. From Rom. xiii. 12.

386-390. From 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

395. The Christians were brought to the statue of Jupiter, and commanded to perform some act of sacrifice or to throw a few grains of incense into the censer; if they refused, they were put to death.

406. *Whip of lead*; i.e. a whip with cords furnished with leaden plummets.

429. *Two answers*, i.e. he had first of all asked her what was her rank, and next, what was her religion; two things

that were unconnected. But it is somewhat obscure; for they were not included "in one demand," though put nearly at the same time.

431. *Similitude*. So in Chaucer; but it is not clear.

439. *T-wis*, certainly. I for once retain an obsolete word.

489-497. Chaucer's own; not in the original Latin.

550. "The Church of St. Cecilia, at the end of the Trastevere, near the Quay of Ripa Grande, was built on the site of the saint's own house in 230; rebuilt in 821, and altered to its present form in 1599 and 1725."—W. M. Rossetti.

V. THE TALE OF THE CANON'S YEOMAN.

972. The canons were a less strict religious order than the monks, but lived, like them, under one roof, and observed the statutes of the order. The chief order was that of the Canons Regular of St. Augustine.

1013. This kind of priest was called an "annualer," because he was solely engaged in singing annual masses for the dead, and had no cure of souls.

1026. *A mark*, a piece of money of the value of 13s. 4d. in England.

1058. *Philosophy*; we should now say "natural science."

1066. "Proffered service stinketh" is an old proverb. In Latin—*Merx ultronea putet*. In French—*Merchandise offerte est à demi vendue*.

1099. The yeoman had previously explained how the toil of blowing of fire, and the fumes of the metals, had spoilt his once ruddy complexion.

1116. Though the priest had ostensibly come merely to repay a mark, he had provided himself with all the materials for performing his feats. See ll. 1165-8.

1122. *A philosopher*; an adept in natural science.

1126. *Mortify*; i.e. affect by chemical action. It was a common term in the old alchemy.

1185. *St. Gile*, or *St. Giles*; French forms of the Lat. Aegidius. *St. Giles' day* is Sept. 1.

1361. *Forty pounds*; a large sum, as we must multiply by at least 15, to obtain the equivalent value at the present day. Suppose it to mean about £600.

1365. A noble was worth 6*s.* 8*d.*; so he brought 120 nobles.

1385. The Tale practically ends here; though there are 96 more lines, containing the application and some discussion.

INDEX OF NAMES

IN this Index, the letter B refers to the Prioress's Tale; the letter C, to the Pardoner's Tale; the letter E, to the Clerk's Tale; and the letter G, to the two last.

In other words, the references are to the Groups into which the Tales are divided; and correspond exactly to the numbering of the lines in the Six-text edition of the Chaucer Society.

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